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ABSTRACT

Teachers, administrators, volunteers, and students involved in Adult Basic Education/English-as-a-Second-Language (ABE/ESL) programs in Washington were interviewed regarding their perceptions of assessment and their assessment needs. The primary objective of the study was to gather information that could be used in developing an assessment model for ABE/ESL programs in the state. Eight administrators of various ABE/ESL programs were interviewed by telephone; a series of focus group discussions were held with 21 teachers and administrators and with 35 students from 2 community colleges (1 rural and 1 urban); and surveys were mailed to 40 ABE/ESL programs. Survey responses were received from 35 program administrators, 58 ABE teachers, 33 ESL teachers, 20 volunteers, 40 ABE students, and 25 ESL students. Data on current assessment practices (including intake and placement, classroom assessment, and end-of-term assessment), major assessment-related concerns and issues, ways of making assessment more useful, classroom assessment, utilization of assessment results, attitudes regarding the usefulness of assessment, and the role of assessment in program accountability and improvement were tabulated and discussed in detail by respondent category. (The interview guides and surveys for the various groups of respondents are appended.) (MN)

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THE Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

PROGRAM REPORT

ED 376 379

Results of Field Research
ABE/ESL Assessment

Prepared for:

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Prepared by:

Ann E. Davis
Kim O. Yap

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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INTRODUCTION

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) contracted the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) to develop an assessment model for Washington State Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Part of the model development process included conducting field research with adult learners, teachers, volunteers, and administrators. During March, April, and May, 1992, field research was conducted in three tiers:

1. Interview with Key Players. Eight key people representing SBCTC, Office of Adult Literacy (OAL), Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA), and Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) were interviewed over the telephone. Their perceptions on current practices, needs, and issues regarding assessment in ABE/ESL programs were obtained.

2. Focus Group Discussions. NWREL moderated focus groups consisting of students, teachers, and administrators. Discussion focused on current assessment practices and issues/problems at intake, and at the classroom and program levels.

3. Questionnaire Survey. The survey included individuals representing various stakeholder groups (e.g., adult learners, teachers, volunteers, and administrators). The survey obtained information from a broader base on attitudes, current practices, and needs regarding ABE/ESL assessment.

By using this approach, a more complete picture emerged regarding the current assessment practices in ABE/ESL programs. The various stakeholders and other agencies were able to provide their perceptions on assessment and their assessment needs. Assessment concerns and issues surfaced from the different groups. The information from the field research will be an integral part in designing an assessment system to better meet the needs of the students and to improve instruction. It will also be used to better address Washington State's need for accountability at the program and federal levels.

This report has been organized according to the three tiers. The procedures and results for each tier are discussed in separate sections.

INTERVIEW WITH KEY PLAYERS

Key players were identified by the SBCTC and represented different agencies collaborating with the ABE/ESL programs. As mentioned previously, the agencies represented included SBCTC, OAL, JTPA, and JOBS. The key players were people holding positions as directors or coordinators of programs at the state or regional levels. Through a telephone interview, the key players were asked five questions:

1. How would you describe the current assessment process regarding adult basic education programs?

2. In your perception, what are some of the major concerns, problems and issues?

3. What can be done to address these concerns, problems, and issues?

4. As you see it, what are some of the essential features of a desired system?

5. In your opinion, how might we integrate assessment with instruction?

The telephone interview lasted 45-60 minutes. Only one person indicated he felt too far removed to answer all questions.

Of the nine key players identified, eight people were actually interviewed. These people included:

- Suzanne Griffin, Assistant Director of Office of Adult Literacy
- Earl Hale, Executive Director of State Board of Community and Technical Colleges
- Donna Miller-Parker, Project Coordinator for National Workplace Literacy
- Bill Moore, Manager of Student Outcomes for State Board of Community and Technical Colleges
- Kathy Penrose, Division Manager for JTPA
- Joe Racek, JTPA Program Coordinator
- Bill Sperling, Director of ABLE-NET
- Chris Webster, Program Coordinator and Supervisor for Policy for JOBS and FIP

NWREL was unable to interview one person even though two appointments had been scheduled and several messages left.

The responses to Question 1 overlapped greatly with Question 2. Responses which related to Question 2 will be summarized under that question. The findings are summarized below by question.

Question 1: How Would You Describe the Current Assessment Process Regarding Adult Basic Education Programs?

The current assessment process is quite variable from program to program. At a general level, most programs do engage in some type of initial assessment for student placement and diagnosis. Programs use a wide variety of formal and informal assessments for these purposes. For placement in ABE programs, the most frequently cited tests were the CASAS, Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), and Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE). Another test mentioned was the Assessment of Skills for Successful Entry and Transfer (ASSET) used by some programs. Generally ESL students take either the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) or the Washington State Adult Refugee Project tests. Placement tests are usually given by secretaries or assistants. It is rare for prospective students to see a counselor.

Most respondents (75%) made no mention about what teachers actually use for diagnosis or how student progress is monitored. Two interviewees indicated that student diagnosis was usually done by the teacher once a student has been placed in their class. Some teachers use the item analysis from the placement test for diagnosis, while other teachers use content specific tests such as Reading for Understanding, or a locally developed mathematics test. Classroom assessment was described as an ongoing process by these respondents. They noted that teachers were starting to use checklists for competencies. In mathematics these checklists are formalized. It was reported that the majority of teachers use paper & pencil tests. Other types of student assessments included unit tests, completion of tasks, and mastery of activities. Students progressed to the next level based on mastery of competencies and teacher judgement. One respondent stated that the ESL programs made more of a concerted effort to do assessment. Because of the waiting lists for ESL and low attrition, more attention is paid to how students are progressing, and programs want to move students to the next level.

For state accountability, the CASAS has been administered for the past three years in the fall to every ABE students--not a sample of students. The students are post-tested with the CASAS after 75-100 hours of instruction. Students who enter the program after this time do not take the CASAS. Over half of the key players commented or discussed concerns about the use of the CASAS. One interviewee commented that it is not what test to use but how to use the assessment information. There is a lot of variation among sites in the use of assessment information to inform clients on where they are and what they need to do to reach their educational goals. There is a general lack of counseling or guidance to students on how to use assessment information. Concerns over the CASAS centered on the absence of a link between the curriculum (i.e., CORE competencies) and the CASAS tests. Also, two key players indicated that the CASAS does not serve as a diagnostic tool for teachers. Another respondent viewed the CASAS as a proficiency test and not an achievement test.

One interviewee felt the concept of CASAS was good as it could provide a common language among programs and agencies and enhance communications. In practice, unfortunately, not all teachers received training in the CASAS. This key player indicated the training model in which at least one person was trained at each site and in turn trained others at their site had been ineffective in disseminating information.

Question 2: In Your Perception, What Are Some of the Major Concerns, Problems, and Issues?

Several broad categories emerged from the responses and are listed below.

Link Between Curriculum and Assessment

Seven of the eight respondents identified this as a concern or problem. Some respondents felt that there currently was no link between the CORE competencies and the CASAS tests. According to the interviewees the CORE competencies are more academic skills while the CASAS tests used by ABE programs assess life skills. Some ABE programs use the CASAS employability tests which still do not correspond to the CORE competencies. Some people felt that student outcomes or competencies should be an application of basic skills in a workplace context.

Lack of Coordination

All key players indicated some type of lack of coordination as an issue. This area of concern basically fell into two subcategories: lack of coordination between sites and between agencies. Half of the respondents stated that assessment procedures differed from site to site--assessment was locally specific. Different tests and procedures were used for placement. Some students are placed in classes based on assessment information while others bounce from class to class. How test results were interpreted and used differed across sites with some programs not following through on what was indicated by the assessment information. Also, two interviewees felt most students did not see guidance counselors, given any particular direction in their education, or informed of their options. Also, because assessment is not coordinated between schools, there is a duplication of effort for mobile students. This is a concern with ABE students who tend to be a mobile population.

This duplication of effort is restated in the concern over lack of coordination between agencies. Adult Basic Education programs serve clients from different agencies such as JTPA and JOBS. These agencies refer clients who have been given the CASAS tests but need to do additional testing (e.g., TABE, Nelson-Denny test) as required by the specific program. It was felt that a common assessment process was needed across agencies.

Ineffective Assessment Practices

Half of the key players saw ineffective assessment practices as a problem in ABE programs. One interviewee felt that most programs do not know if students have reached the targets even though programs seem to effectively place students through formal or informal assessments. Half of the respondents indicated that student progress was ineffectively monitored. They felt that students needed to be clear about their progress--to have ownership. Two people indicated that reasons for ineffective practices were teachers did not understand assessment and lacked faith in their own ability as assessors. Teachers did not understand the consequences of not following standard procedures when administering a standardized test. Some teachers allowed students to take more time than specified for testing or did not follow general test directions.

Confusion about the Concept of Assessment Using One Instrument

Again half of the interviewees noted this as an area of concern. They saw teachers and administrators confused about the different purposes for assessment (e.g., state, program, and student accountability) and that one test could serve all these purposes. They stated that one test can not be used for all things. Also, they indicated that educators did not see assessment as a process but rather equated it with giving formal tests.

Use of Assessment Information Against Teachers

Three key players perceived a conflict between teachers and administrators and between program administrators and the state on the use of assessment information. They felt teachers saw test results as reflecting their teaching -- low scores were indicative of bad teaching. Program administrators thought they might be singled out and lose their funds from the state. Administrators and teachers needed reassurance from the state that the system won't "bite them." One key player suggested selected state level studies to identify strengths and weaknesses and aggregation of data to prevent singling out.

Other areas of concerns which were identified by one or two key players are presented below:

Test Administration

This concern covered such aspects as the cost of testing, the amount of time per learner to do assessment, and the ease of administration.

Issue of Autonomy

Community colleges do not like to be dictated to, and things mandated tend to be "put in a corner." If new ideas or changes are to be accepted then teachers and administrators need to have input and will be supportive if they can see some benefit for themselves.

Lack of Counseling

Students rarely receive appropriate counseling about test results or objective information to make informed decisions about educational plans. Options are not presented nor are students directed in any particular way.

Difficulty in Assessing This Population

The ABE/ESL population tends to be mobile, lacking in English language skills, and ethnically diverse. Also, ABE programs generally have high attrition rates. All these factors pose problems for doing appropriate assessments.

Pollyanna View about Assessment

People in the field seem to have a "Pollyanna" view that the state can replace standardized testing with alternative assessment such as portfolios for state accountability.

Question 3: What Can Be Done to Address These Concerns, Problems, and Issues?

Several areas emerged for addressing concerns, problems, and issues. These are summarized below:

ICANS Project

The majority of key players (6 interviewees) identified the Integrated Curriculum for Achieving Necessary Skills (ICANS) project as playing a role in addressing their major concerns. They view the resultant curriculum as a bridge between the CORE competencies (i.e., ABE competencies) and the Washington Basic Skills Competency System (i.e., the JTPA competencies). The ICANS curriculum will provide a common curriculum for different state agencies (ABE, JTPA, and JOBS) and thus promote coordination and collaboration. Some people indicated that all three agencies were moving in the direction of the competencies in the three-part foundation outlined in the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report. Another interviewee saw the assessment piece from the Northwest Workplace Basics project and the ICANS as providing the needed link between assessment and curriculum. It should be noted that there are four different sets of competencies being mentioned here. They include the CORE competencies, Washington Basic Skills Competency System, SCANs three-part foundation competencies, and Northwest Workplace Basics competencies which are based on the competencies from the research of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). These sets of competencies greatly overlap each other.

One key player, however, did indicate that the ICANS project might exacerbate problems because the state might be asking teachers to use skills they do not have. Also, the ICANS curriculum, which is being developed, will not be mandatory in ABE programs. On the other hand, it was felt the ICANS project will be helpful but a slow process.

Training and Dissemination of Information

Three key players stated training and information dissemination as a means to alleviate problems with ineffective assessment practices and confusion over the concept of assessment. One interviewee saw training in assessment terms to promote a common language, the role of assessment and instruction, the integration of assessment and instruction, and the joint responsibility of teachers and students toward assessment. The use of focus groups for discussion and student panels to determine their needs and attitudes toward assessment were recommended. Other players suggested the dissemination of guidelines on appropriate tests to use, strategies for assessment, "menu of choices," available options for obtaining data needed and "things that work."

Sampling of Programs and Use of Multiple Measures

Two interviewees suggested program sampling on a state-wide basis for external accountability purposes. Also, they recommended the use of multiple measures including a standardized test and performance-based assessments to more accurately reflect competencies achieved.

Information Gathering

One key player recommended gathering as much information as possible on current practices and available options, and then form a team to make recommendations for addressing concerns and problems.

Question 4: As You See It, What Are Some of the Essential Features of a Desired System?

The responses to this question did not fall into as many common categories as they did for the previous questions. However, there were two features which half of the key players identified. One feature was the link between assessment and instruction. Assessment needed to reflect what was being taught and used to improve instruction. One person viewed assessment as a learning tool for students and a tool to improve instruction. Each being an integral part of the other. The second feature pertained to a feedback loop to the students. The students need to see their process through the program. They should understand the goals and the criteria for success. With this understanding, they are more able to assess themselves and reflect on their own learning. The student then becomes part of the process -- they can take control of their learning. One person extended this concept of a feedback loop to include teachers and programs. Teachers use the information to improve instruction; programs to improve delivery of services.

Other essential features stated by one or two key players are listed below:

- Use of multiple measures included either multiple measures to address multiple audiences or multiple measures to assess student outcomes. This also included assessment which is comprehensive, covering the SCANS three-part foundation competencies, functional competencies, and the affective domain.
- "User friendly" involved two different ideas. The first meant a test which is easy to give in a reasonable amount of time. The second involved making the assessment system "friendly" to students and staff through training and providing information.
- Exiting component included two different types of exits. The first dealt with an overall exiting component such as certification of student competency or certificate of initial mastery. The second type of exiting involved an exit assessment at the end of each level.
- Appraisal for placement
- Informal diagnosis of what student already knows
- Benchmark assessments through the curriculum

- Testing and counseling component
- Needs assessment -- a process that identifies learner needs
- Compatibility with the CASAS
- Common assessment across delivery systems (i.e., other ABE programs and agencies)
- Ongoing assessment at classroom and program levels
- Staff input and sensitivity to level of training teachers have received

Question 5: In Your Opinion, How Might We Integrate Assessment with Instruction?

Three key players did not respond to this question and stated: "I have no real suggestions", "I'm not really in touch", and "I have no idea. I'm from the management perspective". The other key players provided suggestions, but no common ways to integrate instruction with assessment emerged from the responses. One suggestion dealt with how we might discover how to integrate instruction and assessment--elicit from the teachers what they do to know when students "know it." Another suggestion focused on the effective integration of life skills and workplace skills which seemed more related to curriculum development. Their other suggestions included:

- Build in post assessment activities
- Include interpretation of testing/assessment as part of the instruction
- Track competencies mastered in a competency-based approach
- Develop curriculum and assessment simultaneously
- Measure learners' progress through a specified set of materials
- Formalize learners' progress through a list of competencies
- Use completion exercises during instruction
- Use teacher-made tests
- Use learning activities as assessment tools

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were conducted by NWREL during the last two weeks of April, 1992. Two different interview guides were developed--ABE/ESL Interview Guide for Teachers and Administrators and ABE/ESL Interview Guide for Students. Please see Appendices A and B. Three focus groups composed of teachers and administrators met to discuss current assessment practices, assessment concerns, ways to improve assessment, classroom assessment practices, use of assessment information by students and programs, and ways SBCTC can help programs. Seven people participated in each focus group.

Because the sessions took place during state conferences and there were time restraints, the focus groups lasted 90 minutes. This turned out to be not enough time to discuss all the topics outlined in the interview guide. Group 1 discussed at length current practices and major concerns (i.e., Question 1 and Question 2), and Group 2 discussed Questions 1-5, and Question 7. At the beginning of the third focus group, a summary of current practices (i.e., Question 1) based on the information from the other focus groups was presented. Participants were asked if they were currently doing any additional practices. Three participants provided additional information. This strategy saved time and enabled the group to discuss Questions 2-7. Considering the major purpose of these focus groups was to surface all major points, it was felt this procedure was appropriate.

NWREL moderated four student focus groups. Two groups were made up of ABE/GED students, and two groups were ESL students. The topics discussed by students included: tests given or assessment processes they went through at the beginning of school, problems encountered with testing, usefulness of test results, their teachers' classroom assessments, ways they know they are progressing, and tests given at the end of term. The students were selected from two community college sites--one rural and one urban. Each session lasted 45-60 minutes.

FOCUS GROUPS FOR ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

A total of 21 teachers and administrators attended the three focus groups. Eleven of the 21 participants (52%) were administrators, nine (43%) were teachers, and one person (5%) worked as a teacher and administrator. Of the teachers, including the one person who worked as a teacher and administrator, three (30%) taught only ABE classes, six (60%) taught ABE and GED classes, and one (10%) taught ESL, ABE, and GED classes. The teachers had been employed by ABE/ESL for an average of almost 11 years; the administrators for about 9 years. The participants came from programs which enrolled an average of 854 ABE students and 693 ESL students per year.

When asked to rate their knowledge about assessment on a scale 1 to 5 with 1 being "know nothing" and 5 being "know a lot", 62 percent of all participants rated themselves "3"; 29 percent gave themselves a "4"; and 9 percent a "5". Overall, these participants felt knowledgeable about assessment. Using the same scale to rate their knowledge about alternative assessment, 15 percent rated themselves "2"; 40 percent a "3"; 30 percent a "4"; and 15 percent a "5". This indicated participants feeling slightly less knowledgeable about alternative assessment than assessment in general--not a surprising result.

Each topic discussed in the focus groups is presented in two parts. The first part is the actual findings; the second part discusses implications gleaned from the results.

Topic 1: Current Practices

Intake/Placement/Diagnosis

At some point, most ABE students are interviewed informally or formally. Some interviews ask basic questions such as age, education completed, reasons for returning to school, employment, and other personal information. Other interviews follow a structured format and are more comprehensive. In these interviews, topics discussed include: financial aid options, different types of instruction and content areas offered, educational/occupational goals, interests, barriers to attending school, time preference (i.e., day or night), and learning styles. Fewer programs seem to do comprehensive interviews and systematically record much of the information obtained. During the interviewing process, some programs will do the actual placement tests/assessments such as an oral reading inventory, math inventory, writing sample , and standardized test. Interviews last from 15-20 minutes to one or two hours. In most cases, a staff person conducts the interview. Rarely does an intake counselor do the interviews and testing--only one program does. Also, one program indicated that a literacy counselor interviewed only low level students.

The content of interviews for ESL students was dependent on their English language skills. If students could speak English, the interviews consisted of oral questions and discussion about their educational goals and plans. Few ESL programs seemed to have a standard protocol for these interviews.

An orientation component is also part of the intake process for some ABE programs. Orientation occurs before the interview, as part of the testing process, after the interview and/or testing or during the first class with the teacher. Orientation includes similar topics mentioned above for interviews. One program director indicated that during orientation, "reassurance" or building self-esteem was the main focus. In which component the information is covered depends upon the specific program. Not all programs obtain the same information or information at the same level of comprehensiveness. Orientation is given to groups or on an individual basis.

A wide variety of tests/assessments are given for placement purposes in the ABE programs. The majority of the programs use the TABE with most programs using the TABE locator test to determine the appropriate TABE level. The next most frequently mentioned was the CASAS appraisal and achievement tests. Other tests/assessments/processes used for placement are listed below:

- ABLE
- Locally developed reading, writing, and math tests. Some of these included learner selection of reading materials and math problems.
- ASSET
- Slosson Oral Reading Test (i.e., SORT-R) for low readers
- Rosenthal Reading Inventory
- Silvaroli Classroom Reading Inventory for low level students. This was used in place of the TABE
- Reading for Understanding
- Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT)
- Oral interview
- Moving students from class to class

For placement in ESL programs, the most frequently mentioned placement test was the Washington State Adult Refugee Project tests. Few programs seemed to use the BEST. One program used a modified version of the Adult Refugee tests. Other programs indicated locally-developed oral and written tests.

Tests/assessments mentioned for diagnostic purposes in ABE programs included:

- TABE
- ABLE
- Individual Reading Inventories
- Nelson-Denny test
- Locally-developed tests

- Reading Evaluation for Adult Diagnosis (READ)
- CASAS Achievement tests
- Placement test used for diagnosis
- Teacher-developed tests

Classroom Assessment

A variety of classroom assessment strategies and procedures are used. In programs which have implemented Computer Competency Programs (CCP), assessments are integrated throughout the learning exercises, and computer-generated weekly progress reports are given to students. Student progress is shown on the different reading and math strands. Many programs keep folders of students' work. Portfolios are kept by a few programs. There seemed to be confusion on the difference between student folders and portfolios--clarification of the difference was given during the focus groups.

Other types of classroom assessment mentioned included: writing samples generally scored holistically or with comments, embedded textbook tests, teacher-made tests/quizzes, checklists of competencies mastered, dialog journal, double-column entry observation journals by students and teachers, evaluation of homework assignments, and ESL CORE competencies completed. Cooperative learning activities are part of instruction, but no one indicated any evaluation of activities or end products.

Techniques for classroom assessment appear varied on the surface but generally fell into the paper and pencil type tests (e.g., teacher-made tests/quizzes, textbook embedded tests, computer generated tests, and graded homework) or checklists. Many classes keep student folders, but how they are used to determine student progress or improve instruction was unclear. Except for a few programs, there appeared to be an absence of performance or alternative assessments being used. Few teachers use observation to evaluate student performance, or evaluate products of cooperative learning activities. Some student writings are holistically scored, but teacher comments on writings seem to be the general mode. No one seemed to be using any of the trait models for assessing student writings. Only a few teachers are using portfolios as an assessment and instructional tool.

At the end of the quarter or after 75-100 hours of instruction, some teachers post-test their students with teacher-made tests, the READ or TABE. The CASAS is required by the state after 75-100 hours of instruction.

In some programs, students move to the next level based upon assessment results such as a 5 point gain on the CASAS or a gain of three grade levels on the TABE. In other programs, students move automatically to the next level after completion of a level. For students who are enrolled in "continuous blocks," there is no movement to the next level.

Accountability

Beyond the requirements for the Annual Student Performance Report which is required by the U.S. Department of Education, most programs do very little additional evaluation activities. The information gathered for this report include data such as: enrollment by ethnic groups, area of instruction, and level; number of students starting and completing

each level; number of students progressing to the next level; reasons students drop-out; and outcomes--number of students receiving their high school diploma/GED, gaining employment, getting off public assistance, and mastering competencies. Programs do participate in program evaluation conducted by ABLE-Network as a peer process. One program indicated they were part of the community college's extensive review done every two or three years. A few programs use student evaluations of their programs for program improvement. Very few programs indicated use of objective measures of student outcomes as indicators of program effectiveness. The reason stated by the majority of participants was lack of time and confidence in measures to reflect what students are learning--people just do not believe in any test. Programs which do use test scores for program improvement aggregate scores from the Nelson-Denny test, CASAS, ABLE, and TABE.

Implications

Overall, student intake consists of four components: interviewing, orientation, placement test/assessment, and student diagnosis. How, when, where, and by whom each component is implemented is as varied as the number of ABE/ESL programs--very little consistency exists across programs. What information is obtained or provided in each component is quite diverse. Time, staffing, funds, and space restrict attempts at more comprehensive ongoing student assessments, sharing of information, and information documentation. A variety of placement tests/assessments are used by programs, indicating a lack of consistency across programs. Some programs are using inappropriate tests. For example, the ASSET is used, but the test's floor is too high to differentiate among low achievers. The ASSET is appropriate for students entering college. Students do appear to be placed effectively and their needs identified, but there appears to be a lack of understanding on how to use assessment information. Assessment information is not necessarily used to improve instruction or as an integral part of instruction. Staff development in quality classroom assessment as an ongoing process and dissemination of information on appropriate measures would help program staff to become better assessors.

Besides collecting information for the Annual Student Performance Report, few programs are engaged in other evaluation activities. There is a lack of objective measures of student outcomes used for accountability or for program improvement. Lack of time and confidence in "tests' are cited as reasons for this. Perhaps, like teachers, administrators also do not know how to use program and assessment information to improve delivery of services. Teachers and administrators would both benefit from staff in-service training in assessment as it applies to the classroom, program, and state levels. The staff development might include topics such as: process of identifying valued student outcomes and appropriate measures--performance-based and standardized; planning assessments; developing performance-based assessments and criteria for evaluating performance; reviewing curriculum for consistency across levels and with assessments and student outcomes; and use of student outcome and program evaluation information. Time for training and implementation needs to be committed for this to occur.

Topic 2: Major Concerns, Problems, and Issues About Assessment

Some of the concerns crossed over with those identified by the key players--link between assessment and instruction and coordination with other agencies. There is a real concern that assessment be linked with instruction. This concern also came across in the section

above on accountability. People lack confidence that a test can assess what students are learning. There were mixed feelings about the usefulness of the CASAS, but a lot of people would like to see a standardized test used across programs. However, they do not want the standardized test to be the only measure of student outcomes.

Participants also saw the need to build relationships with other agencies and caseworkers, to collaborate with them on assessment, and to share assessment information. They would like to see a common curriculum that all agencies could agree upon. Several people felt that the ICANS curriculum and assessment will address this need to coordinate and link assessment with instruction. They felt the best thing about the ICANS assessment piece will be the use of multiple measures instead of one score. The ICANS assessment is still in the process of development.

Some participants would like to share external agencies' information on clients' work goals, and vocational interests. Also, if an agency had information on clients with mental disorders or learning disabilities, they would like this information shared. Most teachers never see assessment results from other agencies. On the other hand, some people were undecided about the use of outside information because of confidentiality and biasing effects on teachers.

Another issue raised in connection with collaboration was "training" agencies on the process of education and time required. People felt agencies have no sense about this and set unrealistic educational goals for their clients such as obtaining a GED in three weeks.

Other issues, problems and concerns raised included:

- System needs to address the differences between large program sites and small sites.
- Lack of consistency among people doing assessment
- Making sure assessment is not intimidating to students
- Time and cost of assessments
- Accuracy of test results for ESL students who are assessed, put on the waiting list, and then enrolled three to four months later. During that time they learn more English and consequently invalidate test results.
- Assessment is too time consuming and takes away from instruction.
- Teachers are not well trained in assessment.
- How to use assessment results to improve instruction. The general process is to take time out from instruction to test, give back results, and then "move on" to the next topic--with hardly any use of test results to modify instruction.
- Too much testing for too many different funding agencies.
- Too many part-time staff and too little time to coordinate or share assessment information within a program
- Open entry is an ineffective practice. It causes difficulties for assessment and instruction.

- Lack of available counseling. In teaching, problems (e.g., drug/alcohol abuse and mental problems) arise which should be dealt with by a counselor. Teachers lack the expertise to assess or deal with such problems.

Implications

The link between assessment and instruction and coordination with other agencies were two dominant concerns in these discussions. Quality classroom assessment was also a general area of concern for many participants. It was interesting to note the emergence of an understanding that one test can not measure all things learned, but multiple measures are necessary for a more complete picture of student achievement. This idea is applicable at the classroom, program, and state levels and is characteristic of current trends in assessment practices.

Identifying student outcomes is the first step in developing any assessment system whether it is at the classroom, program, or state level. However, there is no consistency across programs or within some programs on student outcomes. Identification and clarification of valued targets/outcomes (i.e., How do we know when a student has reached the target? What are the criteria?) is necessary. No one "test" will measure all outcomes. Tests/assessments have different purposes. Program staff need to understand these purposes.

Training on assessment, dissemination of assessment information, and provision of time and opportunities to share information and work with staff within programs and across agencies are needed to address these concerns.

Some problems focused more on program structure/management (e.g., open entry, lag time between ESL testing and enrollment, lack of counseling, and large number of part-time staff) than on assessment. These problems do affect assessment practice and need to be investigated for possible solutions.

Topic 3: Ways to Make Assessment More Useful

Several participants indicated staff training on assessment would help to make assessment more useful. This training might include: ways to assess students at the classroom level; guidelines for developing quality assessments; and how to use results for improvement of instruction. Another suggestion was the development of a notebook which would include assessment guidelines and types of formal, standardized, informal, and benchmark assessments/tests. This notebook might also have guidelines for orientation, a collection of interview protocols used locally or locally-developed reading, writing, and math assessments--things that "work." There seemed to be a need for dissemination of information on assessments that work at the local level and across the country.

Another way to make assessment more useful was to share information between agencies and among their own program staff. Tied to this idea of sharing was the suggestion to take a team or case management approach across agencies and within the program. All of this takes time. More time is needed for ongoing client assessment which is implicit in a team approach. Time is also needed for training. An increase in time was a general suggestion indicated by many participants to make assessment more useful.

Other suggestions included linking assessment with instruction, using students' self evaluations, and use of portfolios program-wide. For those programs using portfolios, it would be more useful to pass student portfolios to the next teachers and to share portfolios within the program.

Implications

Allocation of time for extensive training and sharing of assessment information were major suggestions for making assessment information more useful. The implementation of a team approach also requires program restructuring and the involvement of more staff.

Topic 4: Classroom Assessment

Focus group participants were asked about how successfully assessments identified student needs, ways to integrate assessment with instruction, and suggestions for better monitoring student progress. There seemed to be a consensus that assessment does identify student needs, but it is not always used to improve instruction. In fact, many teachers seem to need training in how to use assessment information for instruction. One participant felt assessment information has improved instruction only to the degree it has helped teachers to focus on what needs to be taught. How to integrate these needs into a curriculum still needs to be addressed. Another participant indicated assessment has improved instruction when the learners are involved in self-reflection. Reflecting on what they have learned and what to learn increases their awareness of their instruction and improves it.

Several suggestions for integrating assessment with instruction and monitoring progress emerged from the discussions. Use of portfolios is seen as an instructional and assessment tool and a way to better monitor student progress by participants currently using portfolios. Students select pieces of work and reflect on their reasons for selection. Students monitor their progress through their self-reflections by comparing pieces to earlier ones and through discussions with their teachers.

Another participant said, "We teach students that a test is a judgement and not a learning experience. Teachers need to learn how to use assessments as learning tools." For most teachers, assessment is a test which you take time out from instruction to give--it is outside the learning experience. A way to integrate assessment and instruction then is to make assessment part of the learning experience--an ongoing process with instruction. Also, teachers need to be made more aware that they are really assessing all the time. They need to see assessment as not just a test but a wide scope of activities.

The use of observation techniques such as an observation notebook was another suggestion. For example, in a whole language approach, the teacher can record observation as students read aloud. Also, another way to integrate the two might be to let students take the role of teacher and make up group questions.

Participants made two additional suggestions: team approach or case manager within the program and across agencies; and peer group discussions.

Implications

Not as much discussion was involved with this question as with the previous ones. One reason might be participants were less knowledgeable in this area. Confusion about the difference between portfolios and student folders was apparent. Training in quality classroom assessment, how to use assessments as learning tools (i.e., one way to integrate assessment with instruction) and assessment information to improve instruction, and use of alternative assessments is necessary to increase educators' knowledge of and skill in assessing students. Using a team or case management approach to monitor progress would also require training in such areas as team building, clarification of roles, how to use a variety of tools, how to make judgements and monitor learner's and program's progress, and program logistics.

Topic 5: Assessment for the Student

This question asked if assessment information helped students know how well they were progressing and how students felt about assessment. The general consensus was that assessment information does help the student to know if the student is progressing. Several people indicated that students might be progressing but the "test" does not show it. In other words, the test lacks sensitivity to small changes.

The portfolio was seen as an effective tool for students to monitor their progress (i.e., looking at work over time and self-reflections are good indicators to students of their progress). Others, using computer-aided instruction, felt progress reports generated every two weeks enabled students to see their progress. These reports indicated progress not on just one thing but on several reading and math strands. Another person said that conferring with students about their strengths and weaknesses was useful to students.

Generally, participants thought most students felt anxious and fearful about tests. Students had already failed in the public schools. However, some students do see it as part of the learning process. People felt students should not be assessed until they know they can succeed. Others indicated that if students could assess the program, they might feel better about being assessed--students would see it as a two way process. Another view was that students hated tests but felt "OK" about assessment if seen as feedback.

Implications

Part of classroom assessment is provision of feedback to students. There is a variety of approaches ranging from formal progress reports at specific intervals to providing assessment information on a continuous basis. Any training in classroom assessment needs to address various ways to provide feedback, involve students in monitoring their own progress, and document student progress.

Topic 6: Program Accountability and Improvement

Participants were asked to discuss what types of information should be used for accountability and for program improvement. Most of the suggestions for program accountability covered what is included in the Annual Student Performance Report--attendance, level transfers, level retentions, employment, and competencies mastered. Other suggestions included student evaluations of self and program, aggregation of performance assessments, and portfolios. For program improvement, suggestions

consisted of student and teacher evaluations of the program, self study, and peer coaching for teacher evaluation. No one mentioned looking at student outcomes as a means of improving programs.

Implications

Most of the information suggested for program accountability are indicators from which inferences about program effectiveness can be drawn. Direct measures of student outcomes were not particularly emphasized or supported. Perhaps this is an indication of distrust about how such information might be used against them. Reassurance and clarification of the purposes for assessments at the state level are needed.

Sampling of performance-based assessments such as writing samples at each ABE/ESL level or open-ended math problem solving and aggregated standardized scores would provide information on student outcomes.

Topic 7: Ways SBCTC Can Help Program Staff Understand Assessment

Most suggestions fell in the category of providing more opportunities to share information within programs and across programs. One way suggested was through more focus groups. Besides providing NWREL with information, most participants found the groups helpful for themselves--ideas were exchanged; they learn about other ways of doing things such as interviews, orientation, placement; and a few received materials to review. People would like more in the "trench" discussions. A lot more staff training on assessment was recommended. Some participants suggested taking advantage of technology such as teleconferences to share information and videotapes shown at focus group meetings. Another category of suggestions dealt with improving communications between the state and program staff. Some people felt program staff get confusing instructions and would like to better understand what the state wants.

Implications

To implement a new assessment system, staff training on assessment will be a critical factor in its success. Feeling isolated from each other, programs need opportunities not only for training but also to share information on what's working for others. Part of sharing information also involves establishing an active network for disseminating assessment information to programs and teachers.

FOCUS GROUPS FOR STUDENTS

A total of 35 students from two community colleges attended the focus groups. Eighteen students (51%) were English as a Second Language students, and seventeen (49%) were enrolled in ABE/GED programs. All the ESL students were enrolled in level 2 (28%) or level 3 classes (72%). The ABE/GED students were from level 2 (41%), level 3 (18%), and GED (41%) classes. ESL students had been enrolled for an average of eight months and the ABE/GED for 16 months. Students were asked to briefly write their reasons for enrolling in their programs. Reasons are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Why Did You Enroll in the ABE/ESL Program?*

Reason	ESL (n=18)		ABE/GED (n=17)	
	n	Percent	n	Percent
Improve English skills	6	33	0	0
Improve basic skills	0	0	3	18
Go to college	5	28	6	35
Get a GED	0	0	8	47
Transfer my degree	2	11	0	0
Job-related (get a job, get a better job, use at work, etc.)	7	39	9	53

*Percentages do not add up to 100 percent because some students stated more than one reason.

Job-related reasons were cited most often by both ESL and ABE/GED students.

The majority of ESL students already were employed and about half held high school diplomas from schools in their native countries. In contrast, most of the ABE students were unemployed, and most of the GED students were either displaced workers or unemployed.

It should be noted that while questions dealing with students' perceptions about their increased abilities were not directly addressed in the interview guide, students shared many examples of what they could do now. Their enthusiasm over their new literacy

skills was quite apparent. For example, one woman who worked as a janitor was excited that she could now read the recycle bins at work. Another man was able to read the bulletin board at work and felt more a part of what was happening there.

The four topics discussed during the focus groups are summarized by topic below. When it is appropriate, the responses from ESL students are summarized apart from ABE/GED student responses. The last part discusses some general implications of these findings. It should be noted that this is a small sample of students, and generalizations to the GED, ABE, and ESL populations should be made with caution.

Topic 1: Intake and Placement

Depending on the site, some students took their tests through the counseling department, ABE department, or testing department. GED students took the practice GED tests. Some of the students indicated they had also taken the ASSET. Most of the GED students said they had seen a counselor and had found the results useful in identifying problem areas. A few indicated they found the test results "surprising"--they had done better than expected. Also, later on, most of these GED students had taken a variety of other tests/inventories on motivation, occupational interests, and aptitude through the counseling department. Most found these good at identifying future goals and for learning more about themselves.

ABE students took tests in reading, vocabulary, and mathematics. Few ABE students said they had seen anyone to discuss the test results. They were called or informed at the time of testing about which class to start. Most of these students had been scared about the test because they had not taken a test in a long time. They also wanted to do their best which added to their anxiety.

All ESL students said they had participated in an oral interview. They were asked questions about their family, length of time in this country, educational level, employment in native country and here, and reasons for enrolling. ESL students took a "test" or a locally developed test consisting of listening, reading and writing. A few ESL students said they had taken the SLEP. About half of the ESL students had felt anxious about the testing and for a few the test had been a "big challenge." Except for one student, all of the students indicated that someone had talked to them about the results. There were mixed reactions about understanding the results--some did understand; some did not.

Topic 2: Classroom Assessment

Most students indicated their teachers had done some diagnostic testing at the beginning of class. Some students discussed with their teachers what they wanted to learn and their short/long term educational goals. One teacher had students record their goals on cards, but for most students these goals were never recorded.

Classroom assessment varied according to content area and level. In the GED classes, students worked at their own pace and handed in assignments. There were pre and post tests in their GED books. Before going to the next book level, students needed to pass the posttest. Students had folders for their writings, took unit tests (e.g., multiple-choice tests and cloze tests), and completed sentences and paragraphs in their books. In math, they completed applying skills and inventory sections which are embedded in their workbooks. Students said no job-related skills such as filling out an application, writing

a resume or interviewing were taught. Also, they did not participate in any group/team activities.

The ABE students indicated their teachers gave them daily quizzes, weekly tests, and midterm tests. Some students did daily writing; others handed in writing samples twice a week. Teachers corrected spelling and grammar, made comments and sometimes graded the papers. Most students had folders for math, reading, and writing. All students said they did group work activities such as solving puzzles and reading, discussing, and answering questions about a story but were not graded on these activities.

ESL students indicated their teachers gave them weekly tests in reading, graded homework, and commented on or sometimes holistically graded their writings. Sometimes peers reviewed their writing and made comments. Some students kept dialog journals. Students participated in group problem-solving and discussion, but no grades were received. Some students had folders which the teacher kept. At the end of the quarter, the teacher would discuss with the students their progress. Some students received instruction in job searching and interviewing which teachers graded.

How Students Know They Are Progressing

All students said they knew how they were progressing from teachers' feedback. Teacher feedback took different forms: grades on end of quarter tests, mid-term tests, weekly tests, quizzes, homework assignments, and essays; teacher-written comments on assignments, writing samples, and journals; verbal communications with teachers--conferences and informal talks during class. Students also knew they were progressing from the type of reading they were doing--difficulty level was higher--and understanding more of what the teacher said in class. All of these things happened within the context of the classroom. Outside the classroom, students knew they were improving by the increase in their literacy skills. ABE students said they were reading more materials and more different things--newspapers, novels, work-related materials, bulletin boards, etc.. One ABE student said, "I'm reading everything now and not embarrassed to ask a stranger on the bus the meaning of a word." Some ABE students noticed a change in their conversations and how they related to people--they understood more words and were more aware of the meanings word created. ESL students noticed improvements in reading newspapers, understanding T.V., filling out bank forms, going to stores, being able to make American friends, understanding music, reading and understanding work-related materials, and participating more in conversations with co-workers.

Students were gauging their educational progress based on information from within the class and improvements they see in their daily lives. Students saw their progress as it related to improved reading, writing, and communication skills.

Topic 3: End of Term

Most students indicated they took a "major" test at the end of the quarter. For the GED students, these were the GED tests; ABE students took a standardized test; and ESL students teacher-made tests. Overall teachers discussed with students the test results. Based on test results and teacher judgement, students were moved to the next level of instruction.

Almost every student felt they were learning what they wanted. A few suggestions for improvement were made. Both groups of ESL students wanted to learn more job-related

skills, spend more time at speaking/listening, and have conferences with teachers about their strengths and weaknesses. Some of the GED students had taken a three week workshop in job preparation and would like it to be part of their GED classes. The workshop covered: job searching, resume writing, interviewing, and building self-esteem.

Topic 4: How Students Feel About Testing

Overall students liked regular tests or quizzes they took during their courses. They provided the student with useful information on how they were progressing. With "big tests for the teacher" (e.g., standardized tests), they felt more anxious and more so if the test is timed. Several ABE students said they hated multiple-choice tests because that's what little kids took. Most of these students preferred open-ended questions. GED students felt quite relaxed about testing except for one student. They also indicated that the GED tests matched what they were learning. Most other students felt the tests were generally "fair."

Other Comments

Few students had additional comments. Below is a listing of comments made:

- More teacher and student discussion on what they will do in class.
- Retesting is good.
- Having a schedule of what will be covered each week at the beginning of the quarter would help manage time.
- Tests help students make decisions.
- Caseworker does not know everything about education.
- There is no discussion at school about options available.
- There is a lack of inter-agency communications about possibilities available to clients.
- Agencies will give you answers but you need to know the right questions to get the right answers.

Overall implications

Discussion of placement test results with students does not appear to be consistent. It is interesting that the group of students--ABE--who appeared the most anxious about tests did not have results discussed with them. Discussion of these results and other standardized test results should become a common practice within and across programs. Discussion could focus on actual test items to uncover information about learners' use of literacy skills and perceptions about literacy.

The GED students seemed to have benefited from the services of the counseling department. Perhaps consideration of establishing stronger links with counseling

departments at sites where they exist or hiring counselors within ABE/ESL programs is needed. For students whose past experience with education and assessment has not been positive, counseling could offer services such as building self-esteem, learning to learn, identifying barriers to educations and planning educational goals.

As portrayed by students, classroom assessments by teachers focused primarily on the use of paper and pencil measures. Evidence of criteria used for writing, for example, appeared lacking. Teachers would benefit from training on other types of assessment such as portfolios, observation, oral questioning, and direct writing assessment (i.e., trait models), how to develop classroom assessments, and ways to monitor student progress.

Throughout these discussions, evidence of increased literacy skills outside the classroom emerged. Classroom and program assessments should include such information through self reports by learners.

Students found information from classroom "tests/quizzes" useful to them as a way to gauge their progress and anxious about "big tests." "Big tests"/standardized tests/important tests should be demystified and purposes clarified. Clear targets for student outcomes and communication of these targets become necessary as a means to demystify these tests.

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

A questionnaire survey was conducted in June 1992 with ABE/ESL programs across the state, including those administered by community-based organizations and correctional institutions. Two questionnaires were developed for the survey, one for program administrators, teachers and volunteers, the other for students. The questionnaires were constructed on the basis of the review of relevant literature as well as input obtained from telephone interviews with key players and focus group discussions. Draft survey forms were reviewed by members of the Assessment Committee and their input was used to prepare the final versions of the questionnaires.

A mail-out procedure was used to administer the survey. Questionnaires were mailed to ABE/ESL program directors with instructions for administering the survey to teachers, volunteers, and students. The survey package was sent to 40 ABE/ESL programs. With follow-up telephone calls during the month of June, 35 programs returned completed survey packages, providing a response rate of 87.5 percent.

The survey data indicated that student enrollments varied greatly from program to program. ABE enrollments ranged from 30 to 4,950, with an average of 674. ESL enrollments ranged from 15 to 2,000, with an average of 548.

The survey data were tabulated and analyzed for the following respondent groups:

Program administrators

ABE teachers

ESL teachers

Volunteers

ABE students

ESL students

The following sections present results of the survey by respondent group.

Program Administrators

Thirty-five program administrators responded to the survey. The program administrators had been with their respective programs for varying lengths of time, ranging from 5 months to 22 years, with an average tenure of 7.9 years.

Student Placement

For ABE intake and placement, a majority (71.4%) of the respondents indicated that interviews were conducted with students. A majority (56.0%) of these interviews consisted of structured questions. Close to one-half (45.7%) indicated that TABE was

used for intake and placement purposes. CASAS was used in about one-fourth (25.7%) of the programs. A few programs used ASSET (4) or ABLE (2).

A large majority (71.4%) of the program directors reported the use of other assessment approaches for intake and placement. These included teacher made tests, writing samples, informal reading inventories, and norm-referenced tests (e.g., Gates MacGinitie, WRAT).

More than one-half (54.3%) of the respondents indicated that educational goals were identified for the students and that counseling was provided to help students plan their education.

For FSL intake and placement, a majority (65.7%) of the respondents reported the use of interviews. Close to one-half (43.5%) of the interview formats included structured questions. More than one-fourth (28.6%) of the respondents indicated that their programs used the Adult Refugee Test for ESL intake and placement. A few programs used CASAS (4) or BEST (1) for intake and placement purposes.

Close to one-half (42.8%) reported the use of other assessment approaches, including teacher-made tests, writing samples, modified versions of the Adult Refugee Test, or a combination of these measures.

More than one-third (37.1%) of the respondents stated that educational goals were identified for students. More than one-fourth (28.6%) reported that counseling was provided to help students plan their education.

When asked to rate the usefulness of the assessment information in placing students, the administrators provided an average rating of 3.8 on a 5-point scale, suggesting that the assessment information was quite useful. As one respondent put it:

> *The interview is fairly effective and it's a good way to get to know the students and put them at ease. That, along with the reading test, gives us a quick indication of how to place them. The drawback is that students come in throughout the quarter and it is difficult to interrupt instruction.*

One respondent commented that the CASAS had not been useful at all for several reasons, including the lack of congruence with the core competencies which rendered the results not particularly relevant. "It took time from instruction time, but did not yield much information."

Another respondent indicated that it took time to assess ESL students and instruments that were easy to administer (by an aide) were needed.

One administrator reported that for ABE students a new procedure will be instituted next fall to provide for student self placement, based on a review of classroom materials and an orientation session. For ESL students, a new placement test has been developed and used for the first time for summer quarter placement with good results.

A large majority (88.6%) of the respondents indicated that the results from the intake/placement process were shared and discussed with the students. In some cases, sharing occurred only when the students asked for the information.

Student Appraisal

To appraise student competencies, a range of assessment measures were used. For ABE students, measures in common use included the following:

For reading, competencies were most often appraised by the TABE. Other instruments included CASAS, Nelson A Reading Test, Gates MacGinitie, BOTEL, READ, Slosson, GED practice tests, and teacher made tests.

For writing, writing samples and the TABE were most often used. Other measures included CASAS, Watch Your Language and teacher-constructed devices.

For mathematics, the TABE was, again, most widely used. Less frequently used tests were CASAS, WRAT, PIAT, GED tests, curriculum-embedded tests, and teacher-made tests.

Relatively few devices were reported in the area of critical thinking. Three respondents reported the use of the GED practice tests. Other methods included writing samples, class discussion, teacher observation, and interview.

No formal measures were used to appraise students' interpersonal skills. Several respondents indicated that this area was not addressed by their programs. A few others reported the use of classroom discussion and observation as a means of appraising competencies.

For ESL students, the respondents reported that a wide variety of methods and instruments were used by the instructors since no specific tests were identified or required by the program. Many of the measures in use were teacher-made and "holistic" in nature. Of the formal measures, the Adult Refugee Test was most frequently cited. Other measures included CASAS, ABLE, and TABE.

For both listening and speaking, classroom observation, discussions, interviews, dictation, and other teacher-made devices were common means of appraising competencies in these areas.

Writing competencies were typically appraised by means of writing samples. In some cases, students kept a file folder of their writing samples. Other methods included informal observation, written homework assignments, and the use of GED pretests.

For reading, appraisal methods included teacher-made tests, classroom observation, and reading assignments involving passages with multiple-choice questions. More formal measures were TOEFL practice test, READ, and the Nelson Reading Test.

When asked to rate the usefulness of the assessment information for identifying student needs, the respondents provided an average rating of 3.8 on a 5-point scale, indicating that the current approaches were quite useful. However, as one respondent indicated, things could be better and his program was planning to implement student portfolios to provide assessment information.

One administrator indicated that the program teachers considered their classroom assessment as more successful than standardized tests. Another pointed out that teachers varied greatly with regard to assessment practices and that there was a need for a standard assessment tool.

One respondent observed:

> *Teacher formulated assessment procedures can be very useful especially if the intent is to seek out student needs and deficits. However, teachers must not fail to ask students what they hope to learn in addition to checking out student readiness for the teachers' agenda.*

A predominant majority (82.8%) of the respondents reported that the results of appraisal were shared with the students.

Classroom Assessment/Testing

For instructional planning and monitoring student progress, the following assessment strategies/approaches were in common use:

- Paper-pencil tests (80.0%)
- Worksheets (71.4%)
- Checklist of competencies mastered (68.6%)
- Scoring of student products (65.7%)
- Student folders (65.7%)
- Oral questioning (65.7%)
- Quizzes (62.9%)
- Self evaluation (54.3%)
- Observation of student performance (45.7%)
- Scoring class activities (25.7%)
- Peer evaluation (14.3%)

Other methods included teacher interviews, conferences, and the use of computer software. One respondent described the use of portfolios in which students put together representative pieces of their work along with a reflective essay describing how the work reflects their learning.

The respondents reported a variety of methods for providing feedback to students on their progress. As one administrator put it:

> *Some teachers use tests and quizzes which they give back. Some use standardized reading tests. Some put written comments on papers. Some use lab materials in reading lab to evaluate and give feedback to students. Some use an oral progress check at the end of class each day.*

Most commonly used were interviews, conferences, student folders, and corrected papers. Some programs provided continuous feedback to students; others provided occasional feedback as it affects students' current level of placement or their impending move to another level.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

One respondent reported that students monitored their own progress through the use of competency checklists, GED practice tests, and instructor evaluation. Another said that student folders were available for the students to review. The folders contained results of tests and quizzes as well as competency checklists. One administrator indicated that students always saw their work. They often scored it themselves. Results were always discussed with students.

When asked how much they knew about the use of different assessment approaches in instruction and program evaluation, the respondents provided an average rating of 3.7 on a 5-point scale, indicating an above-average level of knowledge. On the use of assessment information to modify instruction, the average rating was 3.2 on a 5-point scale ranging from never (1) to always (5).

A large majority (68.6%) of the respondents indicated that they would like to receive training in classroom assessment.

Student Outcomes

A great deal of variation exists among the programs with regard to how they assess student mastery of competencies. As one respondent pointed out:

> *There are no prescribed tests mandated for the program. However, each teacher must evaluate students to determine recommendation for the next step/level. ESL teachers completed a quarterly evaluation report which is passed on to the receiving instructor. In ABE, since the staff is smaller, group evaluation meeting is held and promotion/retention issues are discussed.*

Another administrator indicated that ABE and ESL classes were multi-level. With the open-exit/open-entry policy, student movement between levels was informal and based on teacher observation. According to this respondent, there was a need to develop a more formal way to track student movement between levels.

A program administrator at a correctional institution reported that the average student stayed in the program for three to five weeks and none stayed longer than three months. Student outcomes were judged on the basis of completion of student goals.

Within this wide range of practices, the most commonly used measures were TABE, mastery checklists, curriculum-embedded posttests, writing samples, practice GED tests, and teacher-made tests.

For ABE students, reading competencies were most often assessed by TABE, GED practice tests, CASAS, Reading for Understanding (RFU), ABLE posttest, informal reading inventories, and teacher-made tests.

For writing, common measures included writing samples, TABE, practice GED tests, CASAS and ABLE posttests.

For mathematics, TABE and GED practice tests were again in common use. Other measures were curriculum-embedded tests, CASAS and ABLE posttests, and competency-based exams.

Critical thinking was generally assessed through oral interviews, writing samples, conferences, self-evaluation as well as classroom observation and discussions. Some

respondent mentioned the use of ABLE and ASSET.

Interpersonal skills were essentially assessed through observation and self-evaluation.

The assessment of ESL students was heavily dependent on informal approaches, including the use of oral interviews and other teacher-made devices. Some formal measures included the Adult Refugee Test, GED practice test, and RFU.

Both listening and speaking skills were assessed through observation, interviews or one-on-one verbal tests. One respondent reported the use of role plays written with specific competencies in mind, but geared to life skills (e.g., renting an apartment).

For writing, writing samples and portfolios were used in some programs. One respondent reported the use of student folders which contained students' revised writing samples. Others indicated the use of formal measures such as the Adult Refugee Test, TABE or college placement tests.

Few respondents provided information on the assessment of mastery of computation skills. Two mentioned the use of TABE and ASSET. Another reported the use of life skill examples and activities to assess mastery. One described the attainment of individual contract goals as a measure of mastery.

Mastery of reading skills was largely assessed by means of such formal measures as CASAS, RFU, TABE, ABLE, and Nelson Denny.

CASAS Tests

Less than one-half (48.6%) of the respondents indicated that they had received training in CASAS. Other respondents reported that the instructors or other program staff did receive the training.

On a 5-point scale, the respondents provided an average rating of 1.9 on the usefulness of CASAS for identifying student needs. The primary reasons for the low rating were that CASAS did not relate well with (a) the core competencies, (b) the instructional goals, and (c) the curriculum.

According to one respondent, CASAS identifies low level students and the range on either end are not appropriate for ABE or ESL students. Another said that the CASAS results were not what the program staff needed for placement or monitoring student progress. Most instructors did not find the test useful since their programs were not geared to life skills. One respondent related that the test results were not given to instructors who never heard anything back on the pre/post test information. Another felt that the CASAS results were not diagnostic and described the test as essentially a state-mandated drill.

One respondent felt that the faculty did not understand the theory and practice of competency-based instruction and test results were not meaningful to them.

According to one respondent, CASAS does not speak to students needs but rather what is perceived to be what students should have or be able to do. Another described the test as "an exercise in futility." One respondent provided the following characterization of CASAS:

CASAS tests deal with very discrete items out of a meaningful context. For many of our students, CASAS tests measure test taking ability rather than knowledge. The results of the CASAS test often don't correspond with the teacher's assessment of progress. (We give CASAS tests a lot because we have a PIC contract and are paid per 5 point gain on the CASAS.)

When asked how useful the results from the CASAS were for planning instruction, the respondents provided an average rating of 1.7 on a 5-point scale. One respondent explained his low rating by saying that his instructors found the test of little use, period. Another would have appreciated clear explanation of the results from the CASAS people or others who understand the test.

On a 5-point scale, the respondents provided an average rating of 1.8 on the effectiveness of the CASAS for evaluating students' competencies after instruction.

Less than one-fourth (22.8%) of the respondents would like to receive training in CASAS. One respondent indicated that he would not be interested in training unless CASAS was tied to the curriculum and its usefulness demonstrated. Another provided the following observation:

Evaluation is an integral part of instruction. CASAS is not reflective of the curriculum and instruction being delivered in the program. Also, many competencies which are needed by students and promoted by the program, i.e., interpersonal skills, critical thinking, creative/problem solving skills are not even addressed through CASAS testing.

One respondent indicated that if ABE/ESL programs were going to have to continue using CASAS, the faculty would need thorough, repeated, ongoing training in the whole CASAS concept.

Promoting Student Learning

The respondents provided a range of suggestions on how to make existing testing/assessment practices more effective in promoting student learning and evaluating ABE/ESL programs. To promote learning, many commented on the need for (a) congruency between assessment and instruction, (b) a feedback loop to provide student with meaningful information, and (c) use of multiple measures. One respondent indicated that currently the conferences with students were too informal and the instruments provided students with incomprehensible numbers. Another suggested that assessments be administered individually and in a non-threatening format and time line. One respondent indicated that portfolios seemed to the best option.

Stressing the importance of using multiple measures, one respondent provided the following observation:

Programs need to devise methods that fit their program and population. Competencies can be evaluated without going to a standardized test. We are exploring a combination of tools, including finding something that will help determine competencies mastered.

One respondent indicated that assessment needed to address more closely student interest, workplace learning, and survival skills. Another said that course materials should be designed using criterion-referenced instruction principles, adding:

Students need to get immediate, specific, and helpful feedback as soon as possible after testing. Students need to have the opportunity to have study reviews, work sample lessons, and understand the test and assessment process. The opportunity to retake a

failed lesson, or to get additional instruction, is important.

One respondent stated that since the instructors did not seem to accept current assessment approaches, there was a need to start over with something new. Two respondent felt that there was a need to develop standard assessment measures congruent with the core competencies.

One respondent provided the following observation:

> *We need probably one acceptable standardized test to satisfy program accountability needs, plus a whole battery of assessment options, including student self-evaluation, to promote student learning.*

Another respondent urged the use of more holistic methods of assessment. According to this respondent, we should encourage the use of a variety of measures for both accountability as well as ongoing assessment of learning. Further, we should promote the notion of student involvement in the assessment process through self evaluation, group review and critique. One respondent believed that student should be involved in setting educational goals and in assessing goal attainment.

One respondent said that since there was no congruency between assessment and instruction, using aptitude or achievement test to measure skills gained in the ABE/ESL curriculum was bogus and unjustified.

One respondent indicated a need for a placement instrument which correlates with the core competencies, adding:

> *Diagnostic information is needed so instruction can begin where a student most needs it. Test must be able to be administered and scored by an aide. Portfolios of student work will be effective in assessing learning.*

Program Evaluation

On program evaluation, the respondents' views were quite divergent. For example, one respondent argued against the use of test results, indicating that student growth was greater than what was shown on a test. However, another suggested the use of pre and post testing to assess program results. One respondent suggested the use of data on retention and rate of progress as indicators of program success. An interface with employers could also provide feedback on program impact.

One respondent believed there was a need for an objective measure of progress in all competency areas. Another summed up his feelings as follows:

> *There is a need for an "honest" instrument, one that measures what we need to measure. Right now, I lack trust in everything on the market and I wouldn't praise/punish anybody over much in getting good scores/bad scores on a given instrument.*

One respondent pointed out that student achievement was only one way to measure program effectiveness and suggested that if the state wanted to use student achievement as one way to measure program effectiveness, all programs must agree on a common test instrument with common testing criteria.

Commenting on the use of a common test, one respondent provided this observation:

Eventually, there is probably no way around some standard test because of accountability requirements. But these tests should be as "painless" as possible, since these students have test phobias and will be driven off by too much testing. They need evaluation measures that can be disguised and clearly shown to them as indicators of progress.

Another suggested a way to ease the pain:

Have sample of programs use standardized instrument with a sample of students. Have programs clearly articulate their method of assessment and summarize results.

One respondent hoped that evaluation would not be tied to scale score gains. Rather, programs should be evaluated holistically with reference to student goals.

One respondent suggested that standardized tests be eliminated. He further suggested that mechanism be developed to address the affective aspects of ABE/ESL programs (e.g., feeling good about oneself). Evaluation should be based on student goals -- whatever they might be.

Two respondents provided the following observations in support of the use of multiple measures:

Include other measures of student outcomes besides multiple choice tests. Measure programs by how well instruction is tied to student interest and goals.

I see student test scores as only one part of the evaluation of a total program. Input from students, teachers, administrators, volunteers and/or tutors would need to be compiled. To start, we could ask that teachers collect student evaluations of the program as part of the end-of-quarter interview evaluation.

Improving Assessment Practices

In providing suggestions for improving current assessment practices, the respondents, again, reflected divergent perspectives. One respondent, for example, suggested that ABE/ESL programs use TABE as the only standardized test or develop a standardized test specific to the core competencies or ICANS. Another felt that there was a need to develop an efficient standardized instrument which provides diagnostic information understandable to students in a non-threatening way. One respondent indicated that assessments needed to be more uniform so that all programs could "communicate" with one another about student levels and progress and outcomes.

One respondent pointed out that programs did things differently and standardization would help statewide reporting, contrasting, staff development, and other related areas. Another indicated that there should be "a statewide, standardized, non-biased, easily scored, and relevant test."

One respondent felt that the system needed to provide normative data for comparisons among programs and students. Another observed:

I would very much like to see a statewide test used to evaluate incoming and outgoing students. Progress between levels should also be assessed with entry and exit tests. These tests need to be tied to the reporting system used by the state to determine financial need and program success.

On the other hand, one respondent believed that no single test would do it all and

programs should not be required to use the same test. He would like to see accountability linked to real achievement rather than test scores. Another indicated that portfolios would help and that it would also help if office hours were provided for instructors to consult with students on their progress and to encourage students to give feedback on their needs. The same respondent pointed out that paper-pencil tests could really intimidate some students while others thrived on them. Perhaps students should be allowed to choose the kind of testing they would prefer.

One respondent indicated that some programs relied on informal observation because:

> *... many students come and go so quickly that it is difficult to maintain adequate or appropriate test results. Instructors do not have enough time to keep up with every one with test results. Also, since they do not know how long a student will stay, instructors do not like to lose time from instruction to conduct a complex form of assessment.*

Reflecting on the congruency between assessment and instruction, one respondent said:

> *Assessment system should be tied to curriculum. If the core competencies are required, any required assessment should address them.... Faculty need more thorough staff development to understand competency-based instruction and assessment options. Staff turnover requires that training be repeated, updated.*

One respondent indicated that performance expectations should be clearly defined so that student outcomes could be matched to the expectations. Another suggested that program staff be paid to develop appropriate tools for their program population. He added:

> *Better assessment is needed, but a standardized test is not the answer. Most ABE/ESL staff are part-timers and have very limited time to do this very necessary work. Grant projects are a great way to help staff do this. Our mini grant was tremendously helpful in revising our curriculum .... Now, a grant to work on assessment would be perfect.*

Another respondent indicated that assessment system must go beyond the traditional paper-and-pencil reporting and that faculty must be given time to conduct assessment. The time can either be built into the teaching schedule or be an additional activity compensated accordingly.

One respondent urged that we get rid of multiple choice testing and have students work on tasks where reasoning is required and where it is possible to find out what strategies the student is using -- not just whether they get a test item right or wrong. This way the teacher can identify where the student is and start instruction from that point.

One respondent suggested that better training be provided to faculty and staff on assessment methods across the state. The respondent further suggested the involvement of students in assessment through the use of portfolios which provide for self-evaluation. There should be separate assessment systems for student learning and for state/federal accountability.

ABE Teachers

A total of 58 ABE teachers, including 2 aides, responded to the survey. Most of these program staff provided instruction in writing (70.7%), reading (72.4%), and mathematics (65.5%). A large majority (84.5%) also provided GED instruction. These instructors had

been employed by the ABE/ESL programs for varying lengths of time, ranging from 3 months to 22 years, with an average tenure of 5.7 years.

Student Placement

For intake and placement, these instructors reported the use of a variety of assessment devices. In many cases (63.8%), interviews were conducted with students for placement. A majority (62.2%) of the interviews included structured questions. Formal measures used in intake and placement included TABE (56.9%), CASAS (25.9%), ABLE (8.6%), and ASSET (5.2%). A predominant majority (96.5%) also used other measures, including teacher-made tests, writing samples, GED practice tests, informal reading inventories, curriculum-imbedded tests, Reading for Understanding (RFU), and such norm-referenced tests as Stanford, WRAT, Gates-MacGinitie, and Woodcock.

A majority (67.2%) of the respondents indicated that educational goals were identified for students. More than one-half (58.6%) reported that counseling was provided to help students plan their education.

On a 5-point scale, the respondents provided an average rating of 4.2 on the usefulness of the assessment information for placing students in ABE classes.

One respondent indicated that he would like a good writing assessment. Another reported that the program was looking at alternative reading assessments. According to one instructor, the TABE gave a "ball park" estimate but was far from in-depth. It was pretty useless for the poorest readers. The same respondent indicated that the math diagnostic test was good for computational skills but poor on problem solving and that the GED practice tests were good predictors of success.

One respondent described the CASAS as impractical. The test did not provide enough information and the logistics of pretesting and posttesting was a nightmare for many reasons. The respondent suggested that the CASAS be eliminated and in its place an in-house interview be used. Another indicated that the CASAS did not tie in with the ABE curriculum. The program used its own tests to place students in appropriate classes.

One respondent indicated that more student-centered assessment was needed to help students identify educational goals.

A predominant majority (94.8%) of the respondents indicated that results of the intake/placement process were shared with students.

Student Appraisal

To appraise competencies and to identify areas of instruction, the ABE programs used a range of formal and informal measures. In reading, the most commonly used test was TABE, followed by GED practice tests, CASAS, and ABLE. Several respondents reported the use of writing samples (including self-evaluation) and student portfolios. Other measures included informal reading inventories, curriculum-imbedded tests, teacher made tests, informal interviews, Dolch word lists, Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Gates-MacGinitie, PIAT, RFU, and WRAT. One respondent reported the use of a GED computer software to provide a comprehensive evaluation of students' skill levels.

Writing samples were widely used to appraise writing competencies. Among other

commonly used measures were TABE, GED practice tests, Watch Your Language, and teacher made tests.

For mathematics, the most widely used measures were TABE and CASAS, followed by GED practice tests and teacher-made devices (including a VCR instructional program). Some respondents reported the use of ABLE, WRAT, and curriculum-embedded tests.

Several respondents indicated that they used GED practice tests to appraise critical thinking/problem solving skills. A few reported the use of CASAS, TABE, or ABLE. Others reported the use of informal means such as classroom observation, discussion, and informal interviews. Some indicated that critical thinking/problem solving skills were incorporated in content areas assessment (e.g, math and English).

The appraisal of interpersonal skills was conducted largely through informal classroom observation and interviews.

On the usefulness of the assessment information for identifying student needs, the respondents provided an average rating of 4.1 on a 5-point scale.

One respondent indicated that at least one quarter was needed for accurate assessment. Another suggested the inclusion of some kind of life skill inventory and specific reading skills at the lower levels. One respondent suggested that a criterion-referenced test be created to match the core competencies.

One respondent felt that not enough time was available to deal with each student on an individual basis. Another reported that assessment information was very useful when used in conjunction with teacher evaluation and observation. One respondent indicated that students' needs were best appraised through anecdotal information, not standardized "hard' data.

A predominant majority (94.8%) of the respondents reported that the results from appraisal were shared with the students. One respondent cautioned, however, that giving a student a test score indicating a grade level could be very discouraging for the student.

Classroom Assessment/Testing

A range of assessment approaches were used to gather information for instructional planning and monitoring student progress. The most commonly used included:

- Paper-pencil tests (94.8%)
- Scoring student products (89.6%)
- Oral questioning (82.8%)
- Worksheets (81.0%)
- Student folders (79.3%)
- Quizzes (69.0%)
- Checklist of competencies mastered (65.5%)

- Self evaluation (51.7%)
- Observation of student performance (36.2%)
- Scoring class activities (31.0%)
- Peer evaluations (13.8%)

Other assessment approaches included discussions, conferences, GED pretests, computer software, and observation.

One respondent reported that one-on-one evaluations were conducted with students. This occurred informally as the teacher worked with the student to identify problem areas in specific subject areas. The student actively participated in assessing his/her areas of weakness and strength.

Another respondent described his assessment approach as follows:

> *Student maintains a personal notebook that holds (1) intake information (biographical information, goals, schedule, assessment and diagnosis information), (2) a learning log of all activities and resources used on any day in class, (3) all papers related to reading, (4) papers related to math, (5) papers related to writing, (6) weekly evaluation and suggestions, (7) other materials related to individual learning choices, e.g., money or health management.*

Feedback to students on their progress was provided largely through one-on-one conferences with students. Other specific methods for providing feedback included the following:

- Feedback is given orally and in writing to all students on a daily basis.
- Student folders are kept in a sequential order so students can periodically check on their own progress.
- Students must pass progress tests before they move on to the next level.
- All written assignments receive a score and narrative feedback.
- Quiz scores are recorded on assignment sheets and the instructor goes over quiz scores with each student.
- Feedback is provided through printouts from computer (Classworks System).

When asked to rate how much they knew about the use of different assessment approaches in instruction and program evaluation, the respondents provided an average rating of 3.3 on a 5-point scale. On how often they used assessment information to modify instruction, the average self-rating was 4.2 on a 5-point scale ranging from never (1) to always (5).

A majority (75.9%) of the respondents would like to receive training in classroom assessment.

Student Outcomes

To assess students' mastery of competencies, the respondents reported the use of a range of formal and informal methods. In reading, among the commonly used measures were TABE, GED practice tests, CASAS, and ABLE. Other measures included Nelson Reading Test, competency tests, curriculum-imbedded tests, interviews, classroom discussions, self-evaluation, observation, teacher-made tests, computer quizzes, and the GED 2000 software.

For writing, the most commonly used assessment methods were writing samples (sentences, paragraphs, essays) and GED practice tests. Other measures included teacher observation and curriculum-embedded tests. In a few cases, respondents reported the use of TABE or ABLE.

A range of assessment tools were used in mathematics, including such formal measures as GED practice tests, CASAS, TABE, ABLE. Informal measures included curriculum-embedded tests and teacher made tests.

Critical thinking was assessed through teacher observation, self-evaluation, group projects, oral interviews as well as GED practice tests, CASAS, and TABE. Some respondents indicated that these skills were also assessed through applied reading and math (e.g., math story problems and reading comprehension).

Interpersonal skills were assessed largely through teacher observation, along with oral interviews and role plays.

CASAS Tests

A majority (60.3%) of the respondents received training in CASAS. On the usefulness of results from CASAS for identifying student needs, the respondents provided an average rating of 2.7 on a 5-point scale. The respondents provided the following reasons for the low rating:

- CASAS is narrow and exclusionary -- it touches but does not understand student biographies, needs, and aspirations.
- The CASAS questions are very life-skill and work related.
- The CASAS does not identify individual needs and is not specific enough.
- The appraisal test is very low-skilled.
- The information does not fit the curriculum on campus.
- We have never seen the results!
- Even the highest level of the CASAS tests is too easy for most of our students. They do not measure reading comprehension except at a literal level. They do not correlate to the core competencies or to the GED competencies. They do not measure advanced problem-solving in math.
- Students who score well on the CASAS cannot usually pass the GED. The results appear to be misleading. Writing skill is not assessed at all.

The respondents provided low ratings on the usefulness of the results from CASAS for planning instruction and their effectiveness for evaluating the students' competencies after instruction. On a 5-point scale, the ratings were 1.8 for both purposes. Less than one-third (29.3%) of the respondents indicated that they would like to receive training in CASAS.

Promoting Student Learning

To make existing assessment practices more effective in promoting student learning, one respondent suggested the use of student portfolios which allow students to evaluate and recognize their progress. Another suggested the development of a student questionnaire to address student learning patterns and modalities.

Two respondents favored the use of TABE. Another, however, felt that the TABE did not correlate well with the core competencies. Writing, critical thinking and interpersonal skills were not tested at all. In addition, the TABE was too long (3.5 hours).

One respondent indicated that CASAS might be used with students who were upgrading skills for a job. Another believed that GED students should not be tested by CASAS.

Several respondents indicated that there should be more uniformity in assessment. One indicated that all instructors needed to use the same tests in the same way. Another believed that assessment practices would be more effective if the same measures were used across the state. One respondent provided the following observation:

> *I think there should be more consistent testing and a more standardized system so we could begin to measure the results of our teaching and diagnosing. I feel that we are somewhat just guessing so much of the time and really wanting accountability.*

Other suggestions for making the assessment tools more effective in promoting student learning included:

- The students should be involved with assessing their progress and keeping the records.
- A reading test needs to be developed that works with the objectives in the core curriculum.
- Objective-based tests with measurable outcomes give students a clear sense of tangible goals and thus act as incentive for learning.

Program Evaluation

To make assessment practices more effective for program evaluation, several respondents indicated that there should be a match between assessment and instruction. As one respondent put it:

> *I would hope that any instrument used to test students as well as evaluate the success of the program would test what we are told to teach.*

One respondent suggested that CASAS could be used for program evaluation if it could

be modified to match the ABE curriculum. Another indicated that CASAS was potentially the easiest system to implement throughout the state.

Improving Assessment Practices

To improve current assessment practices, one respondent suggested the use of criterion-referenced tests which correlate with the core competencies. Another indicated that more emphasis should be placed on informal approaches:

> *I feel that there should be more emphasis placed on the student/instructor interview and that some of the placement testing should be eliminated or postponed until the students feel more comfortable in the class.*

Another respondent suggested that learning styles be incorporated as part of the assessment process and that more time be provided to talk with students as they enter the program.

Several respondents said that assessment activities should be kept to a minimum. One indicated that more money should be spent on educating the disadvantage instead of assessment. Another observed:

> *I think it is important that testing be kept to a minimum. Most ABE students have had negative experiences with testing throughout their past schooling experiences. To continually test ABE students to fulfill outside regulations without consideration for the students is counterproductive. It's important to keep testing/assessing as non-threatening as possible. Often this is easier accomplished using informal observations than a structured formal testing situation. Also, the gains shown on a formal test may be lower than what the student expects and discourage him/her to stay in school. Plus most tests do not totally reflect all what the student has learned. Sometimes the gains the students made are in such small increments that finding a test that measures such fine progress is difficult.*

Other respondents provided the following suggestions:

- Make/design tests that are easy, quick and accurate. Reports should be easy to generate, easy to read, and easy to understand.
- Allow program sites to choose assessment tools which suit their programs.
- Use a standard guide to score writing samples.
- Contract with a testing service to write a test based on the core competencies for ABE and GED and arrange for all agencies (JTPA, JOBS, etc.) to accept the test scores to evaluate student progress.
- Use TABE instead of CASAS.
- Include assessments to screen for learning disabilities.
- Provide intensive statewide training on assessment.
- Conduct assessment on an ongoing basis in a structured manner to monitor student learning and for program accountability.

ESL Teachers

Thirty-three ESL teachers responded to the survey. These program staff had been with their respective programs for varying lengths of time, ranging from 6 months to 20 years, with an average tenure of 7 years.

Student Placement

A majority (60.6%) of the ESL teachers indicated that interviews were used in student intake and placement. In more than one-half (55.0%) of the cases, structured questions were included in the interviews. Two formal measures in common use for intake and placement were the Adult Refugee Test (24.2%) and CASAS (15.1%). Other measures included teacher-made tests, the Tacoma Community House Literacy Test, and ESL placement exam.

One respondent reported that teachers in each section -- morning, afternoon, and evening -- created their own assessment tests. There was no consistency within the program. Another reported the development of placement tests based on the core competencies. The assessment package included oral interviews and reading, writing, listening components.

About one-half (48.5%) of the respondents indicated that educational goals were identified for the students. More than one-half (51.5%) reported that counseling was provided to help students plan their education.

When asked to rate the usefulness of the assessment information for placing students, the teachers provided an average rating of 3.8 on a 5-point scale.

One respondent indicated that the teacher-made assessment test was very useful in placing students. Another saw a need to develop local tests that coincide with the specific curriculum of the respective programs. Other respondents provided the following observations:

- The Adult Refugee Test is too limited for the current students.
- There is a need to develop assessment tools for pre-literate and low beginning level students.
- For ESL students, there is a need for a better system, but it would require a paid aide or teacher to evaluate students.
- Oral interviews and a listening test should be included.
- There should be a more in-depth initial interview.

Slightly more than one-half (51.5%) of the respondents reported that the results from the intake/placement process were shared and discussed with students.

Student Appraisal

For listening and speaking, the most frequently used assessment devices were oral interviews and the Adult Refugee Test. Other measures included listening exercises, dictation, quizzes, ESL placement tests, teacher-made tests, and teacher observation.

Writing samples were most frequently used to appraise writing competencies. Other assessment approaches included the use of the Adult Refugee Test, the Tacoma Community House Literacy Test, TABE, CASAS, BEST, and teacher-made tests.

Many respondents indicated that no assessment was conducted to appraise computation skills. In cases where assessment was conducted, the assessment measures included informal teacher-made tests and curriculum-embedded tests. In some cases, formal measures such as TABE and CASAS were used.

For reading, among the commonly used assessment measures were CASAS and the Adult Refugee Test. Teacher made tests and curriculum-imbedded tests were also frequently used. Other measures included TABE, BEST, SLEP, Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT), and Nelson Denny.

On the usefulness of the assessment information for identifying student needs, the ESL teachers provided an average rating of 3.6 on a 5-point scale. According to one respondent, determining what the student needed was usually not the problem. Providing instruction -- finding an appropriate course -- that matches the specific needs of the student was the challenge.

One respondent would like mid-point assessments so that when students left or went to another class, program staff could agree on what level the students had achieved. Another reported that ESL student needs were mostly identified through interviews. Their needs were varied and could not be addressed by any existing tests.

A majority (69.7%) of the respondents reported that the results from appraisal were shared with the students.

Classroom Assessment/Testing

The respondents reported the use of the following assessment strategies/approaches to gather information for instructional planning and monitoring student progress:

- Oral questioning (84.8%)
- Worksheets (84.8%)
- Paper-pencil tests (81.8%)
- Quizzes (69.7%)
- Scoring student products (66.7%)
- Self-evaluation (45.4%)
- Checklists of competencies mastered (45.4%)

- Observation of student performance (45.4%)
- Student folders (39.4%)
- Scoring class activities (18.2%)
- Peer evaluations (18.2%)

One respondent had students keep portfolios of their homework exercises, tests, and journal assignments. Raters evaluated the portfolios to judge achievement of core competencies. The respondent also videotaped students in simulated job interviews and had raters evaluate speaking/listening competencies.

Another indicated that most teachers spent between 9 and 12 hours a week with approximately 20 students and had ample evidence for a global and a skill-specific assessment. The push now was to get as much of the evidence as possible down on paper (e.g., tracking sheets) both for documentation and for improvement of instruction.

One respondent reported that her classes were at the pre-literate level and assessment was based on such competencies as ability to follow directions and answer questions. Students were moved to higher levels based on their basic communication skills.

Feedback on progress was provided to students largely through classroom discussions, individual conferences or counseling sessions, and notes and comments on class work and tests.

When asked how much they knew about the use of different assessment approaches in instruction and program evaluation, the respondents provided an average self-rating of 3.4 on a 5-point scale. On how often they used assessment information to modify instruction, the respondents provided an average rating of 3.8 on a 5-point scale ranging from never (1) to always (5).

A predominant majority (90.9%) of the respondents would like to receive training in classroom assessment. Several indicated that the training should be concise, to the point, and expert, and that resources should be provided to support the training. One respondent provided the following observation:

> *I would very much be interested if the assessment does not become a burden in record keeping/paperwork. It should be a flexible tool just as instruction is and it must be comprehensive and specific enough to accurately assess progress.*

Student Outcomes

Mastery of competencies was generally assessed through teacher observation, teacher-made tests, and the Adult Refugee Test. For listening skills, teacher observation, dictation, and interviews were frequently used.

In the area of speaking, interviews and classroom observation were among the common methods of assessment. As one respondent put it:

> *Assessment is based on observation (in class) of each student's ability to express simple ideas, paraphrase a paragraph, use vocabulary correctly, pronounce basic sounds in the English language.*

Other methods included oral exercises and tests and role plays of life-skills situations. One respondent reported that students were required to defend their opinions and ideas orally, to question others' opinions, to restate information, and to offer explanations.

Various writing activities (e.g., sentences, short essays, stories, resumes, job applications) were commonly used to assess writing competencies. One respondent provided students with the opportunity to write weekly. Students saved the first sample for comparison with the final sample through self-evaluation. Another described a similar approach:

> *Five writing assignments are given during the quarter involving one or two self edits and rewrites. A checklist of errors is kept to show each student's weaknesses and progress through the quarter.*

Relatively little assessment was conducted in the area of computation. As one respondent put it:

> *Our program in general has done little in this area. Teachers will go over material listed in the competencies, but are generally stuck if a student needs help with raw concepts of basic math.*

In cases where assessment was conducted, the measures included worksheets, quizzes, and other teacher-made tests.

For reading, the most commonly used formal measure was CASAS. One respondent reported the use of the Portland Community College exit tests. Informal measures included quizzes, curriculum-imbedded tests, and teacher-made tests.

One respondent used materials gathered from newspapers relating to current events and cultural trends. Exercises and tests were made up from these materials to enhance the students' ability to recognize and use word forms, vocabulary in context, synonyms and antonyms. Another tested students on passages given to them to study and read aloud in class.

CASAS Tests

Approximately one-half (54.5%) of the respondents received training in CASAS. When asked to rate the usefulness of CASAS for identifying student needs, the respondents provided an average rating of 2.3 on a 5-point scale. There was a general perception that CASAS was not useful for ESL. One respondent described giving the CASAS appraisal test to beginning ESL students as a humiliating experience for the students and the instructor. Another said CASAS was not geared to the competencies of ESL students. Several respondents offered similar comments:

> *We get a more accurate assessment (and more quickly) from an oral interview.*
>
> *Our program is oriented around a sequence of basic academic skills and CASAS is more life skills oriented.*
>
> *The feedback is not timely. It did not measure listening/speaking and writing abilities when we gave it. It lacks face validity with our students because it does not mirror the classroom activities which are used to teach and assess competencies. It's a one-shot deal.*
>
> *We never got feedback on student scores on CASAS -- not able to compare with other forms of assessment.*

Students entering lack English skills to read and answer.

We did not have funding or support services. CASAS was a waste of time and money.

We have never received the test results. So we have been unable to use them.

The respondents provided generally low ratings on the usefulness of the results from CASAS for planning instruction or evaluating students' competencies after instruction. Specifically, on a 5-point scale, the ratings were 2.4 and 2.5, respectively. Only one-third (33.3%) of the respondents indicated that they would like to receive training in CASAS.

Promoting Student Learning

Many respondents would prefer a continuous classroom assessment model for promoting student learning. One respondent, for example, indicated that giving daily or weekly feedback was more effective than testing. Another felt that assessment was best done by the individual teacher, based on the particular class he or she may be teaching. According to this respondent, the variations in student ability were so great that it was difficult, if not impossible, to have accurate standardized testing.

One respondent summarized his feelings as follows:

Assessment is ongoing and happens everyday in the classroom. The teaching/learning activities of the classroom can be used by the student to receive continuous assessment of achievement. The process should provide for continuous feedback so that a student can continuously self-assess progress. Student can and do fear tests; tests can inhibit learning. Portfolios and project-based assessment tools help provide cleaner pictures of student performance over time and therefore reduce anxiety. The assessment tool should also serve as a tool to promote student learning. The process needs to provide timely feedback which can be understood by the student.

Other suggestions from the respondents included:

- Get more teachers involved with alternative assessment practices in addition to tests.
- Develop instruments in close cooperation with those who do the teaching.
- Develop two types of instruments -- one for academic skills and the other for life skills.
- Provide more individualized, one-on-one assessment.
- Have student provide input on how they would like to be assessed.
- Find a better assessment for reading that is more academic as most students plan to continue their studies.
- Develop an aural interview for better screening and initial placement of students and for identifying student needs.
- Have pre and post tests that are designed to address ESL competencies.

- Develop tests that can be given to large classrooms full of diverse students many of whom know no English and some of whom lack native language literacy.

- Make the testing practices relevant to our students, their needs and their backgrounds. Share the results with the instructors working with the students. Make access to these results simple and easy for appropriate people.

Program Evaluation

Several respondents were doubtful that one could conduct fair evaluations of ESL programs, given the characteristics of the ESL student populations. One suggested that individual programs be allowed to devise procedures that best meet the needs of their particular students and community.

On the other hand, one respondent indicated that a coordinated assessment tool would aid teachers in deciding who has mastered competencies and in identifying areas of need. Another said a statewide standardized curriculum with a content/curriculum based evaluation would be helpful.

One respondent indicated that testing/assessment practices must be established and uniformly and consistently implemented before results could be used for program evaluation.

Improving Assessment Practices

The respondents identified several obstacles to improving current assessment practices and emphasized the importance of support and technical assistance. One respondent, for example, pointed out that ABE/ESL program were staffed by part-timers who were not able to devote a lot of time to assessment and tracking. Only a few programs had assessment teams who could interview and assess the students as they walked in the door. Another indicated that more support -- release time and resources -- should be given to faculty so that an assessment system could be implemented.

One respondent felt that language acquisition did not lend itself to testing in any neat orderly way. Environment at work and at home made so much difference. Another indicated a need to train teachers on how to test effectively in class without disrupting class activities.

One respondent suggested that there should be a clearer picture of what was expected of each level of instruction and assessment should address these expectations. Another saw a need to look at the goals of ESL programs and to clarify the objectives (e.g., job oriented vs. academic oriented).

Other respondents provided the following suggestions for improving current assessment practices:

- Make competencies more understandable for students. Rewrite them without technical jargon. Students could understand and evaluate their own progress better if they understood the competencies better.

- Provide instructors with more information and training in the kinds of ongoing assessment that have proved their success in ESL classes.

- Develop a simple, short, easy to administer, accurate assessment instrument for all ESL classes.
- Explore the use of portfolios for assessment.
- Give more control to teachers and students to determine needs and allow them to devise means of assessment that will show achievement of the students' personal goals and institutional goals.

Volunteers

Twenty volunteers responded to the survey. These volunteers had been with the ABE/ESL programs for varying lengths of time ranging from six months to four years, with an average tenure of 1.8 years.

Student Placement

The responses from the volunteers were very similar to those of program teachers, indicating that a range of assessment tools were used for intake and placement.

For ABE students, this involved the use of interviews, CASAS, TABE, ABLE, and ASSET. Over one-half (55.0%) of the volunteers indicated that other measures were also used, including GED practices, Watch Your Language, RFU, Gates MacGinitie, and Nelson Denny. Five respondents indicated that educational goals were identified for ABE students. Four reported that counseling was provided to students to help plan their education.

For ESL students, assessment measures included interviews, CASAS, and the Adult Refugee Test. Three respondents indicated that educational goals were identified for students and that counseling was provided to students to help them plan their education.

On a scale of 1 to 5, the volunteers provided an average rating of 3.7 on the usefulness of assessment information for placing students.

Seven (35.0%) of the respondents indicated that the information from the intake/placement process was shared with students.

Student Appraisal

For ABE students, appraisal was conducted with TABE, RFU, ABLE, and GED tests. Other measures included workbook posttest, computer software (Classworks), and teacher-made tests. Writing samples were most frequently used to appraise writing competencies. TABE and Watch Your Language were also used. For mathematics TABE and ABLE were used, along with lab designed math tests and workbook posttests. For critical thinking and problem solving, the volunteers reported the use of observation, interviews and discussions. ABLE and workbook posttests were also used. Interpersonal skills were appraised through small group work, informal observation, and informal conversations.

For ESL students, listening and speaking skills were assessed through oral interviews, job interview role playing, and teacher-made tests. Writing was assessed through CASAS, self-assessment, the intake questionnaire, and computer generated tests. Computation skills were assessed through workbook activities. For reading, the assessment measures were CASAS, self-assessment, computer generated tests, and the intake questionnaire.

On a scale of 1 to 5, the respondents provided an average rating of 3.9 on the usefulness of the assessment information for identifying student needs. Less than one-half (45.%) of the respondents reported that the results from appraisal were shared with students.

Classroom Assessment/Testing

The respondents (number in parentheses) indicated that the following assessment strategies and approaches were used to gather information for instructional planning and monitoring student progress:

- Paper-pencil tests (13)
- Oral questioning (12)
- Scoring student products (e.g., writing samples and projects) (12)
- Worksheets (11)
- Student folders (11)
- Quizzes (9)
- Self-evaluation (8)
- Checklists of competencies mastered (6)
- Observation of student performance using a checklist (6)
- Scoring class activities (4)
- Peer evaluations (4)

Other approaches included portfolios, benchmark tests, informal observation, referral information, computer software (Classworks), and group discussions.

The respondents indicated that feedback to student on progress was generally provided through oral and written communication, often on a one-on-one basis. One respondent said that verbal encouragement and praise, non judgmental correction of errors were provided. Another provided descriptive and extensive notes on class assignments and end-of-quarter letters detailing progress made during the quarter. One respondent reported that he reviewed evaluation results with students in private conferences and informal conversations.

Most of the volunteers indicated that they had limited knowledge of the use of assessment for instruction and program evaluation. On a 5-point scale, they provided an average rating of 1.7. On how often they used assessment information to modify

instruction, the respondents provided an average rating of 2.7 on a 5-point scale ranging from never (1) to always (5). One-half of the respondents indicated that they would like to receive training in classroom assessment.

Students Outcomes

For ABE students, mastery of reading competencies was assessed through the use of such formal measures as TABE and ABLE. Informal measures included oral reading with comprehension and successful completion of workbooks. Writing was assessed by TABE and writing samples. For mathematics, assessment tools included TABE, GED tests, and worksheets. Critical thinking and problem solving were assessed through teacher observation, writing samples and reading comprehension. Assessment of interpersonal skills involved teacher observation, discussions, and conversations.

For ESL students, listening skills were assessed by worksheets, paper and pencil tests, checklists of competencies, oral questioning, and observation. The assessment of speaking skills involved the use of worksheets, competency checklists, oral questioning, and observation. Writing skills were assessed through worksheets, paper and pencil tests, competency checklists, writing samples, and CASAS. In the area of reading, assessment tools included worksheets, paper and pencil tests, competency checklists, oral questioning, and CASAS. One respondent reported that students must be able to follow written directions, comprehend paragraphs at different levels of difficulty and show evidence of reading for pleasure. The respondents provided no information on the assessment of computation skills.

CASAS Tests

None of the respondents reported having received training in CASAS. On the usefulness of results from CASAS for identifying student needs, the respondents provided an average rating of 2.2 on a 5-point scale. One respondent indicated that program staff did not receive scores from the testing office. Even if they did, the scores would not let them know how students would perform on reading and writing tasks. They would only indicate competency on small component skills and test-taking skills. Another respondent said that students entering Level I could not successful take a test because of their lack of English skills.

The respondents gave low ratings (2.4 on a 5-point scale) on the usefulness of the results from CASAS for planning instruction and their effectiveness for assessing students' competencies after instruction. Only four respondents indicated that they would like to receive training in CASAS.

Promoting Student Learning

To make the existing assessment practices more effective in promoting student learning, some respondents made the following suggestions:

> *Involve the student more, discuss the results of all evaluation with students, develop less stressful techniques and environs to evaluate student. Focus less on discrete skills out of context and look more holistically at the person and skills.*
>
> *Have students create projects, writings, etc., instead of using the test format. Allow*

students to use their imagination in learning instead of being fed information and tested at the end.

Hold training sessions for volunteer tutors in the CASAS program.

We give the students the oral feedback (on their daily work) which lets them appreciate their progress. Assessment tests would most likely be too sophisticated and would be discouraging.

Program Evaluation

On program evaluation, one respondent suggested that students be given the opportunity to evaluate the program on a quarterly basis and that there be a suggestion box for students to provide input to let staff know how the latter were doing and how they could improve. Another respondent indicated that any test capable of evaluating the program would have to be simple, measuring the simplest English skills in order to chart program accomplishments.

Improving Assessment Practices

To improve current assessment practices, one respondent suggested the increased use of computer technology. He would like to see more testing done on the computer. Another respondent would like to have an assessment test that can be administered by a tutor or volunteer.

Results of surveys with program administrators, teachers, and volunteers are summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Summary of Survey Results for ABE Programs

Item	Respondent Group Administrator	Teacher	Volunteer
Average Length of Tenure (years)	7.9	5.7	1.8
Student Placement			
Assessment tools*	Interviews TABE CASAS tests	Interviews TABE CASAS tests	Interviews CASAS tests TABE
Usefulness of information**	3.8	4.2	3.7
Results shared with students***	88.6%	94.8%	35.0%
Student Appraisal*			
Reading	TABE CASAS Nelson Rdg Test	TABE GED tests CASAS	TABE RFU ABLE
Writing	Writing samples TABE CASAS	Writing samples TABE GED tests	Writing samples TABE Watch Your Language
Mathematics	TABE CASAS WRAT	TABE CASAS GED tests	TABE ABLE Curriculum -embedded tests
Critical thinking/ problem solving	GED tests Writing samples	GED tests CASAS TABE	Observation Interviews Discussion

Table 2--continued

Summary of Survey Results for ABE Programs

Item	Respondent Group: Administrator	Teacher	Volunteer
Critical thinking/ problem solving--continued	Class discussion		
Interpersonal skills	Class discussion Observation	Classroom observation Interviews	Small group work Observation Conversation
Usefulness of information**	3.8	4.1	3.9
Results shared with students***	82.8%	94.8%	45.0%
Classroom Assessment/ Testing			
Assessment tools*	Paper-pencil tests Worksheets Checklists	Paper-pencil tests Scoring student products Oral questioning	Paper-pencil tests Oral questioning Scoring student products
Assessment knowledge**	3.7	3.3	1.7
Use of assessment**	3.2	4.2	2.7
Would like training in classroom assessment***	68.6%	75.9%	50.0%
Student Outcomes*			
Reading	TABE GED tests CASAS	TABE GED tests CASAS	TABE ABLE Oral reading

Table 2--continued

Summary of Survey Results for ABE Programs

Item	Respondent Group: Administrator	Teacher	Volunteer
Student Outcomes*--continued			
Writing	Writing samples TABE GED tests	Writing samples GED tests Curriculum-embedded tests	TABE Writing samples
Mathematics	TABE GED tests Curriculum-embedded tests	GED tests CASAS TABE	TABE GED tests Worksheets
Critical thinking/ problem solving	Oral interviews Writing samples Self-evaluation	Teacher observation Self-evaluation Group projects	Teacher observation Writing samples Reading comprehension
Interpersonal skills	Observation Self-evaluation	Teacher observation Oral interviews Role plays	Teacher observation Discussion Conversations
CASAS Tests			
Received training***	48.6%	60.3%	0.0%
Usefulness of CASAS results for:			
Identifying student needs**	1.9	2.7	2.2
Planning instruction**	1.7	1.8	2.4

Table 2--continued

Summary of Survey Results for ABE Programs

Item	Respondent Group Administrator	Teacher	Volunteer
Usefulness of CASAS results for: **--continued**			
Evaluating student competencies**	1.8	1.8	2.4
Would like training***	22.8%	29.3%	20.0%

* Three most commonly used instruments.

** Average rating based on a five-point scale.

*** Percent of respondents who said yes.

Note: The survey included 35 program administrators, 58 ABE teachers, and 20 volunteers.

Table 3

Summary of Survey Results for ESL Programs

Item	Respondent Group Administrator	Teacher	Volunteer
Average Length of Tenure (Years)	7.9	7.0	1.8
Student Placement			
Assessment tools*	Interviews Adult Refugee Test CASAS	Interviews Adult Refugee Test CASAS	Interviews Adult Refugee Test CASAS
Usefulness of information**	3.8	3.8	3.7
Results shared with students***	88.6%	51.5%	35.0%
Student Appraisal*			
Listening	Classroom observation Discussions Interviews	Oral interviews Adult Refugee Test Listening exercises	Oral interviews Job interview role-playing Teacher-made tests
Speaking	Classroom observation Discussions Interviews	Oral interviews Adult Refugee Test Listening exercises	Oral interviews Job interview role playing Teacher-made tests
Writing	Writing samples Informal observation GED tests	Writing samples Adult Refugee Test TABE	CASAS Self-assessment Intake questionnaire

Table 3--continued

Summary of Survey Results for ESL Programs

Item	Respondent Group: Administrator	Teacher	Volunteer
Student Appraisal*--continued			
Computation	No data	Teacher-made tests Curriculum-embedded tests TABE	Workbook activities
Reading	Teacher-made tests Classroom observation Reading assignments	CASAS Adult Refugee Test	CASAS Self-assessment Computer-generated tests
Usefulness of information**	3.8	3.6	3.9
Results shared with students***	82.8%	69.7%	45.0%
Classroom Assessment/ Testing			
Assessment tools*	Paper-pencil tests Worksheets Checklists	Oral questioning Worksheets Paper-pencil tests	Paper-pencil tests Scoring student products Oral questioning
Assessment knowledge**	3.7	3.4	1.7
Use of assessment**	3.2	3.8	2.7

Table 3--continued

Summary of Survey Results for ESL Programs

Item	Respondent Group: Administrator	Teacher	Volunteer
Classroom Assessment/ Testing--continued			
Would like training in classroom assessment***	68.6%	90.9%	50.0%
Student Outcomes*			
Listening	Observation Interviews Verbal tests	Teacher observation Dictation Interviews	Worksheets Paper-pencil tests Checklists
Speaking	Observation Interviews Verbal tests	Interviews Classroom observation Oral exercises	Worksheets Checklists Oral questioning
Writing	Writing samples Portfolios Adult Refugee Test	Writing samples Resumes Job applications	Worksheets Paper-pencil tests Checklists
Computation	TABE ASSET	Worksheets Quizzes Teacher-made tests	No data
Reading	CASAS RFU TABE	CASAS Curriculum-embedded tests Teacher-made tests	Worksheets Paper-pencil tests Checklists
CASAS Tests			
Received training***	48.6%	54.5%	0.0%

Table 3--continued

Summary of Survey Results for ESL Programs

Item	Respondent Group Administrator	Teacher	Volunteer
Usefulness of CASAS results for:			
Identifying student needs**	1.9	2.3	2.2
Planning instruction**	1.7	2.4	2.4
Evaluating student competencies**	1.8	2.5	2.4
Would like training***	22.8%	33.3%	20.0%

* Three most commonly used instruments.
** Average rating based on a five-point scale.
*** Percent of respondents who said yes.

Note: The survey included 35 program administrators, 33 ESL teachers, and 20 volunteers.

ABE Students

Forty ABE students responded to the survey. A high percentage of the students reported that they found out about the ABE program from their friends (45.0%) or relatives (22.5%). About one-fifth (22.5%) came to the program on their own. Others heard about the program through the JOBS program (12.5%), flyers (10.0%), their employers (5.0%), or the JTPA program (2.5%). Other information sources included college catalogs, school advisors and counselors.

Student Placement

A majority of the students indicated that before starting classes, program staff talked to them about the following things:

- Their educational plans (87.5%)
- Test results (80.0%)
- Why they wanted the class (77.5%)
- What they wanted to learn (75.0%)
- Past school experiences (67.5%)
- Different ways of getting an education (50.0%)

A predominant majority (95.0%) of the students indicated that the talk was helpful to them.

Classroom Assessment

The students reported that a range of assessment activities were conducted by their teachers to find out how well they were learning, including:

- Reading writing assignments (92.5%)
- Talking with the student alone (85.0%)
- Maintaining folders of student work and reviewing (82.5%)
- Checking worksheets (80.0%)
- Asking questions during class (77.5%)
- Giving paper-pencil tests (72.5%)
- Watching a student do something and judging how well it was done (67.5%)
- Looking over projects students have completed (60.0%)

- Using checklists of things students have learned (57.5%)
- Giving quizzes (52.5%)
- Reviewing homework assignments (50.0%)
- Self-evaluation (50.0%)
- Talking with students in small groups (35.0%)
- Evaluating activities done by a group (22.5%)
- Having students grade each other's work (17.5%)

According to the students, the following were particularly helpful in finding out how well they were doing in class:

- Checking worksheets
- Teachers going around the room checking on students
- Asking questions in class
- Keeping student folders
- Reading writing assignments
- Talking with students alone on how well they are doing
- Keeping samples of students' work
- Test results
- Evaluating activities in a group and by individual students
- Paper-pencil tests and quizzes

One student provided the following observation:

> *The TABE test shows how far and the areas where you need to study. Taking the pretest helps boost your self esteem for taking the actual GED test. It prepares you for what's going to be on the GED test. The instructors are great in helping you in class. Also helpful in directing you for further education at the college.*

CASAS and TABE Tests

More than one-third (37.5%) of the students reported that they had taken the CASAS tests. Of those who had taken the tests, less than one-third (27.3%) felt that the CASAS test results showed what they knew very well. Another 9 percent said the test results were "so so" in showing what they knew.

A majority (62.5%) of the students indicated that they had taken the TABE. More than one-third (35.7%) of those who had taken the test felt that the results showed what they

knew very well. Another 25 percent indicated that the test results were "so so" in showing what they knew.

ESL Students

Twenty-five ESL students responded to the survey. A majority of the students reported that they found out about the ABE program from their friends (68.0%) or relatives (20.0%). Twelve percent came to the program on their own. Others heard about the program through the JOBS program (4.0%), flyers (4.0%), their employers (4.0%), school counselors (4.0%), or the JTPA program (4.0%).

Student Placement

A majority of the students indicated that before starting classes, program staff talked to them about the following things:

- What they wanted to learn (60.0%)
- Past school experiences (52.0%)
- Their educational plans (44.0%)
- Test results (44.0%)
- Why they wanted the class (44.0%)
- Different ways of getting an education (28.0%)

A large majority (80.0%) of the students indicated that the talk was helpful to them.

Classroom Assessment

The students reported that a range of assessment activities were conducted by their teachers to find out how well they were learning, including:

- Asking questions during class (96.0%)
- Watching a student do something and judging how well it was done (84.0%)
- Checking worksheets (80.0%)
- Reviewing homework assignments (76.0%)
- Giving paper-pencil tests (76.0%)
- Reading writing assignments (72.0%)
- Talking with the student alone (60.0%)

- Using checklists of things students have learned (52.0%)
- Giving quizzes (52.0%)
- Looking over projects students have completed (48.0%)
- Talking with students in small groups (40.0%)
- Self-evaluation (36.0%)
- Maintaining folders of student work and reviewing (32.0%)
- Evaluating activities done by a group (32.0%)
- Having students grade each other's work (16.0%)

According to the students, the following were particularly helpful in finding out how well they were doing in class:

- Test results
- Checking worksheets
- Quizzes
- Reading writing assignments
- Reviewing homework assignments
- Computer tests

CASAS and TABE Tests

Forty percent of the students reported that they had taken the CASAS tests. Of those who had taken the tests, one-third (33.3%) felt that the CASAS test results showed what they knew very well. Another one-third said the test results were "so so" in showing what they knew.

One-fifth (20.0%) of the students indicated that they had taken the TABE. Less than one-fifth (16.7%) of those who had taken the test felt that the results showed what they knew very well. One-third (33.3%) indicated that the test results were "so so" in showing what they knew.

Student survey results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Student Survey Results

Item	ABE Student	ESL Student
Information sources about ABE/ESL program*	Friends Relatives Nobody	Friends Relatives Nobody
Placement interview topics*	Reasons for taking the class Student's educational plans Test results	What student wants to learn Past school experience Student's educational plans
Usefulness of placement interview**	95.0%	80.0%
Classroom assessment activities*	Reading writing assignments Student folder/ portfolios Individual conference	Oral questioning Teacher observation Checking worksheets
Particularly helpful classroom assessment activities*	Checking worksheets Teacher checking on class activities Oral questioning	Test results Checking worksheets Quizzes
Having taken CASAS**	37.5%	40.0%
CASAS results showing what student knows***	27.3%	33.3%
Having taken TABE**	62.5%	20.0%
TABE results showing what student knows***	35.7%	16.7%

* Three most cited information sources, topics, or activities

** Percent of respondents who said yes.

*** Percent of students who said yes, based on students who had taken the test.

Note: The survey included 40 ABE students and 25 ESL students.

Appendices

FOCUS GROUP

ABE/ESL Interview Guide for Teachers and Administrators

Please complete the following information items:

1. Your current position (please check)

___administrator

___teacher--if you are a teacher, please check all that apply below

___ESL
___ABE
___writing
___reading
___math
___GED
___other (please specify)_____

___other (please specify)_____

2. Please indicate your program site:_____

3. Approximately how many students are enrolled in ABE/ESL at your program site?_____

4. How many years have you been employed by the ABE/ESL program?_____

5. In a general, on a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your knowledg· about assessment? (Please circle)

1 2 3 4 5

Know nothing — Know a lot

6. In general, on a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your knowledge aoout alternative assessments or performance-based assessments (e.g., portfolios, writing samples)

1 2 3 4 5

Know nothing — Know a lot

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the current assessment/testing practices in your ABE/ESL program for each of the following levels? (i.e., What tests/strategies/approaches/formal or informal techniques are used at each level?)

   * Intake/diagnosis/placement
   * Classroom--monitoring student progress/instructional planning
   * Program level--evaluation, accountability

2. What are some of your major concerns, problems, and issues about assessment at each level?

   * Intake/diagnosis
   * Classroom
   * Program

3. What can be done to make assessment more useful for you at each level? (Probes: norm-referenced tests, performance assessment, curriculum-embedded tests, portfolios)

   * Intake/diagnosis
   * Classroom
   * Program

4. At the classroom level:

   * Does assessment help you to identify student needs and to improve instruction?
   * How could assessment be integrated with instruction? What suggestions or ideas do you have for better monitoring student progress?
   * What role should the teacher play in testing/assessment?

5. At the student level:

   * How can assessment information help students know how well they are succeeding or progressing?

- How do you think students feel about assessment/testing? What effects does testing/assessment have on them?
- What role should the student play in testing/assessment?

6. At the program level:
   - What types of assessment information should be used for accountability?
   - What types of assessment information should be used for program improvement?
   - What are the best ways to get these types of information?

7. How can we help program staff to better understand assessment options and to better use assessment results?

8. Do you have other observations or comments?

FOCUS GROUP

ABE/ESL Interview Guide for Students

Please provide the following information:

1. Currently, you are a student in which of the following classes? Please check all that apply.

___ESL
- ___Level 1
- ___Level 2
- ___Level 3

___ABE
- ___Writing
- ___Reading
- ___Math

___GED

2. How long have you been enrolled in the ABE/ESL program?
___months ___years

3. Briefly state the main reason you decided to enroll in the ABE/ESL program.

4. Were you referred to the ABE/ESL program by another program (e.g., JTPA, JOBS)?

___Yes
___No

If yes, which program? (please specify)_____

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Intake/diagnosis:

   * What assessment procedures did you go through to be placed in the classes you are now enrolled?
   * Did someone share and discuss the results with you? How helpful were the results in planning your education and placing you into an appropriate class?
   * What problems did you encounter during the placement/diagnosis process?
   * What information/procedures/strategies would have been more helpful to you in making decisions about your educational goals?

2. Classroom assessment:

   * What tests or assessments does the teacher give during class?
   * How do you know if you are succeeding or progressing in class?
   * What problems/concerns do you have about classroom assessment?
   * What other strategies/procedures would help you to know if you are succeeding or progressing?

3. At the end of the term:

   * What test or assessment does the teacher give you to find out what you have learned?
   * Does the teacher discuss the results with you? In what ways are the results useful to you?
   * What type of testing/assessment would have been better or more useful?

4. How do you feel about testing and assessment? What effects do they have on you?

5. What ideas do you have about improving testing and assessment procedures in the ABE/ESL program?

6. Do you have any other comments or observations?

ABE/ESL Survey for Administrators, Teachers and Volunteers

The Washington State ABE/ESL program is surveying its administrators, teachers and volunteers to gather information about current practices in testing and assessment. The information you provide will be used to identify a system which will provide necessary information to the state, program, teachers and students on the achievement of learning outcomes. The survey takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your honest responses will be appreciated. All answers will be confidential. Results from this survey will be used only in aggregated form. Please return the survey to your program director's office by June 10, 1992. Thank you very much for your help!

Please provide the following information: (please check all that apply)

1. You current position (please check)

   ___ **administrator**--please specify title: _____

   ___ **teacher**--if you are a teacher, please indicate subject areas you teach. Check all that apply below:

   ___ ESL
   ___ ABE
   ___ writing
   ___ reading
   ___ math
   ___ GED
   ___ other--please specify: _____

   ___ **volunteer**

   ___ **other position**--please specify: _____

2. Please indicate your program name and site:

   _____

3. Approximately how many students are enrolled at your site per year?

   total number of ABE students = _____ per year

   total number of ESL students = _____ per year

4. How many years (including this year) have you been employed by the ABE/ESL program?

   _____ years _____ months

Student Placement

5. At the time of intake/placement, what test(s) or assessment is given to the students to identify the appropriate level of classes for them? Please check all that apply below:

ABE Students	ESL Students
___ interview--is there a set of structured questions for all students? Circle one: yes no	___ interview--is there a set of structured questions for all students? Circle one: yes no
___ CASAS test	___ CASAS test
___ TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education)	___ BEST (Basic English Skills Test)
___ ABLE (Adult Basic Learning Exam)	___ Adult Refugee Test
___ ASSET	___ Other: _____
___ Other: _____	___ Other: _____
___ Other: _____	___ Student goals are identified
___ Student goals are identified	___ Counseling is provided to help students plan their education or provide options to student
___ Counseling is provided to help students plan their education or provide options to student	

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful is the test/assessment information for placing students:

Not useful at all 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 Very useful

If not useful (rating 1 or 2), what can be done to make the information more useful?

7. Are the results from the intake/placement process shared and discussed with the students?

____ yes

____ no

Student Appraisal

8. What test(s) or assessment is given to appraise student competencies and areas they need instruction. Please list or describe the assessment test(s) or procedure used for each area below. If test(s) used for intake/placement are also used for diagnosis, please also indicate them below:

ABE Students	**ESL Students**
Reading	Listening
Writing	Speaking
Mathematics	Writing
Critical thinking/problem solving	Computation
Interpersonal skills	Reading

9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful is the assessment information for identifying student needs?

Not useful at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very useful

If not useful (rating 1 or 2), what can be done to make the information more useful?

10. Are the results from appraisal shared with the students? (please check)

____ yes

____ no

Classroom Assessment/Testing

11. Please indicate the assessment strategies/approaches which are used to gather information for instructional planning and monitoring student progress. Check all that apply.

___ paper-pencil tests
___ checklists of competencies mastered
___ worksheets
___ observation of student performance using a checklist
___ scoring of student products such as writing samples and projects
___ student folders
___ quizzes
___ scoring class activities
___ peer evaluations
___ oral questioning
___ self-evaluation
___ other_____

If other strategies/approaches are used, please briefly describe the approaches below:

12. How do you provide feedback to students on their progress? Please briefly describe below.

13. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you know about the use of different assessment approaches in instruction and program evaluation?

I know very little 1 2 3 4 5 I know a lot.

14. On a scale of 1 to 5, how often do you use assessment information to modify instruction?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always

15. Would you like to receive training in classroom assessment, including some of the items in questions #11?

___ yes

___ no

Student Outcomes

16. At the end of the course (or after a certain number of class hours, or set of learning experiences, or unit of study), what procedure/test/assessment is used to determine the competencies the students have mastered? How do you know if the student is ready for the next level? Please briefly describe the procedure or indicate the test(s)/assessment used for each area.

ABE Students	ESL Students
Reading	Listening
Writing	Speaking
Mathematics	Writing
Critical thinking/problem solving	Computation
Interpersonal skills	Reading

CASAS Tests

In the fall of each year, the CASAS test is administered to determine the students' level of competency. Another CASAS test is given after 75-100 hours of instruction. Please answer the following questions about the CASAS test.

17. Did you receive training in CASAS?

    ___ yes

    ___ no

18. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful are the results from the CASAS for identifying student needs?

    Not useful 1 2 3 4 5 Very useful

    If you think the results are NOT useful (rating 1 or 2), please briefly explain why you feel that way.

19. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful are the results from the CASAS for planning instruction?

    Not useful 1 2 3 4 5 Very useful

20. On a scale of 1 to 5, how effective is the CASAS test for evaluating the students' competencies after instruction?

    Not effective 1 2 3 4 5 Very effective

21. Would you like to receive training in the CASAS?

    ___ yes

    ___ no

22. How can the existing testing/assessment practices be changed to make them more effective in

    (a) promoting student learning?

    (b) evaluating ABE/ESL programs?

23. If you could improve the current assessment system to provide better information for faculty and students, what changes would you make? Please use reverse side if you need more space.

ABE/ESL Survey for Students

Directions

The state of Washington is trying to find out about testing activities in your Adult Basic Education/English as a Second Language (ABE/ESL) classes. What you tell us will help us make things better for you and other students. This survey will take only a few minutes to finish. There are no right or wrong answers. We will not share your responses with other people. So please be very honest when you respond to the survey. When you have finished the survey, please return it to your program director's office **no later than June 10, 1992.**

If you do not understand any of the questions, you may ask a friend to help you with your responses.

Thanks very much for your help!

Survey Questions

1. At what school are you taking your ABE/ESL classes?

   _____ ____

2. How did you find out about the ABE/ESL program? Check all that apply.

   ___ Friends

   ___ Relatives

   ___ Nobody (I came on my own)

   ___ Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) program

   ___ Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program

   ___ Radio/TV

   ___ Flyer

   ___ Employer

   ___ Other_____

3. What course/program are you enrolled in? Please check one.

___ English as a Second Language

___ Adult Basic Education/GED

4. Before starting class or right after you started, did program staff talk to you about the following things? Please check all that apply.

___ your past school experiences

___ why you wanted to take the class

___ what you wanted to learn

___ your educational plans

___ different ways of getting an education

___ test results

Was the talk with program staff helpful to you?

___Yes ___No ___Not sure

5. During class, teachers can do different things to help them find out how well the students are learning. Below is a list of things that a teacher can do. Please check all the things that your teacher have done in your class this year.

___ giving paper-pencil tests

___ giving quizzes

___ using checklists of things students have learned

___ checking worksheets

___ watching a student do something and judging how well the student did it

___ reading writing assignments

___ looking over projects students have completed

___ reviewing homework assignments

___ putting samples of student work in a folder and looking over the samples now and then to find out how much students have learned

5. continued

___ self-evaluation

___ evaluating activities done by a group

___ having students grade each other's work

___ asking you questions during class

___ talking with you alone about how you were doing in class

___ talking with you and two or three other students about how they were doing

___ other (please tell us what the teacher does):

_____

6. Were any of the things listed in Question 5 especially helpful to you in finding out how well you are doing in class? If yes, please tell us which ones. Also, please tell us what other kinds of things would be helpful.

7. Have you taken the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) test?

___ Yes

___ No

___ Not Sure

8. How well do you feel the CASAS test results show what you know? Please check one.

___ Very well

___ So so

___ Not well

___ Not sure

___ I did not take CASAS.

9. Have you taken the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)?

___ Yes

___ No

___ Not Sure

10. How well do you feel the TABE test results show what you know? Please check one.

___ Very well

___ So so

___ Not well

___ Not sure

___ I did not take TABE.

This is the end of the survey. Please return it to your program director's office now. Thanks very much for your help!